I Said Yes... Even When I Had No Clue

Farzin Rahmani-Shirazi

Chapter One: Hi

Now that I've entered the sunset years of life—that golden hour when naps are sacred, slippers are stylish, and your joints forecast the weather better than the BBC—I find myself irresistibly drawn to reflection. Looking back, not with regret, but with curiosity, gratitude, and a touch of wonder.

Some people take up stamp collecting or birdwatching when they retire. Others discover the quiet joys of gardening. Me? I seem to have developed a fondness for storytelling. Perhaps it's nostalgia that comes with age, or maybe it's simply easier to reminisce than to bend down and tie my shoes. Whatever the reason, the pull to look back and take stock is no longer one I can resist.

Much of my life was spent in service to others—often people I never met again, sometimes never even saw awake. That's the strange beauty of medicine. It's an odd blend of science, art, and mystery, where you're granted entry into the most vulnerable pages of someone else's story. In my case, I usually met people just before they lost consciousness.

For over forty years, I had the curious privilege of putting people to sleep—not with bedtime stories or lullabies, but with anaesthesia. As an anaesthetist, I was the steady hand and quiet voice just before the plunge into unconsciousness, helping guide patients safely through surgeries while the spotlight shone elsewhere. You could say I was the calm before the cut—and sometimes, before the storm.

Beyond the operating theatre—between long hospital shifts and bleary-eyed morning rounds—I managed to carve out time to travel, connect with communities around the world, and lend a hand where I could. My passport collected more stamps than my medical license got renewals (and that's saying something). Whether it was humanitarian work, medical missions, or teaching trips, I took on any role that needed filling. Some days I was tending to children in remote clinics; other days, mentoring young doctors who reminded me of my own idealistic beginnings.

And while that might all sound noble—and I hope, at times, it was—nothing I accomplished happened in isolation. None of it would have been possible without the extraordinary individuals who dreamed up these missions, offered their time, shared their resources, and inspired

me to say yes. We were united by a shared belief in something bigger than ourselves—enough to turn good ideas into action.

I owe my deepest thanks to my family, especially to Shida. With patience, grace, and unwavering faith, she made not only the possible achievable—but the impossible feel within reach.

And so here we are.

A few stories. A few remarkable people who dared to begin something. A handful of lessons. A tribute or two. And I hope, a laugh or three. I won't promise every chapter will be profound, but I do hope you find something here worth holding onto—a chuckle, a quiet moment, or a reminder that even behind-the-scenes lives can leave a lasting imprint.

Let's begin.

My precious family Lt to Rt Ashiyan, Raz ,Shida ,Farzin, Emma, Theo , Niaz and Shaun

Chapter Two: Roots and Reversal

I was born in Tehran, Iran, on October 20, 1946—back when telephones still had dials and the idea of wireless was pure science fiction. My early years were shaped by a rich heritage and a family whose values were deeply anchored in faith and service.

My father, Hadi Rahmani, was the son of Jafar Rahmani-Shirazi, who—under the direct guidance and approval of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—built the Pilgrim Centre near the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa. To add a touch more historical weight, on my father's side, He was also a great-grandchild of Mishkin Qalam, the famed Bahá’í calligrapher of the time of Bahá’u’lláh, whose artistry adorned the sacred writings with beauty and reverence.

My mother, Azarmidokht Maghzi, had her roots from Isfahan and was herself a great-granddaughter of the “Beloved of the Martyrs.” Clearly, ancestry didn’t do things halfway in my family. With spiritual giants in the rear-view mirror, the pressure was on—though as a child, I was more concerned with kites and climbing fruit trees than noble legacies.

In response to Shoghi Effendi’s call during the Forty-Five Month Plan, my parents made a bold decision. With my grandmother, sister, and me in tow, we moved to Afghanistan as Bahá’í pioneers. This was no small feat; it involved courage, sacrifice, and an unshakable faith in the path ahead. Over seven years of dedicated service, our small but spirited group helped establish the first Local Spiritual Assembly, as well as secure both the National Bahá’í Centre and a site earmarked for a future temple. For a young boy, it was a time filled with both adventure and awakening—a front-row seat to dedication in action.

But life, as ever, had its own script.

In 1955, in an unexpected act of political convenience (or maybe inconvenience), Mohammad Reza Shah of Iran and Mohammad Zahir Shah of Afghanistan joined forces on one of the rare things they could agree on: expelling us. Our family, along with two other Bahá’í families, was forced to leave Afghanistan. One day, we were settled pioneers; the next, we were stateless wanderers packing bags with more questions than answers. It was disorienting and painful. For a while, we drifted through Pakistan—first Karachi, then Quetta—awaiting guidance from the Bahá’í World Centre.

Even as a child, I felt the sting of displacement. Friends were left behind, routines uprooted, and a sense of belonging—so carefully cultivated—was suddenly gone. But in our family, despair was always met with determination, and sadness often came paired with a strange, almost stubborn hope.

And then, many decades later, life looped back in the most unexpected of ways.

In 2021, as the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, I found myself once again deeply connected to the country that had once exiled me. This time, not as a child pioneer, but as someone helping to support face-to-face education for over 4,000 secondary school girls across 17 regions. It seems Afghanistan and I had unfinished business. More than half a

century had passed, and yet, here I was again—older, grayer, but no less committed to service.

It’s funny how the universe works. You think you’ve closed a chapter, only to discover you’ve been cast in the sequel.

Chapter Three: A Pilgrimage and a Purpose

While we were still in Pakistan—displaced and uncertain—our family received an invitation that would remain forever etched in our hearts: Shoghi Effendi extended to us the sacred bounty of a nine-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

It is difficult to describe what such a journey meant to my parents at that time. After years of dedicated service, personal sacrifice, and sudden uprooting, the visit was not simply a spiritual retreat—it was a renewal. A balm for the soul. We walked the blessed grounds with reverence, soaking in the peace that seemed to emanate from every stone, every breeze, every whispered prayer under the olive trees. The air itself felt charged—not just with history, but with hope.

For my parents, it was a return to the spiritual epicentre of their deepest convictions. For me, still young but already marked by exile and upheaval, it planted a seed—a sense that no matter how scattered we were by circumstance, we were never truly lost.

During our time there, the Guardian gave my father two instructions that would shape the next chapter of our family’s service.

The first: to return to Iran and help reawaken the spirit of pioneering among the Baha’is—to rekindle that flame both within the country and beyond its borders. My father accepted the task with the quiet resolve I had come to admire in him. There was no dramatic speech, no ceremonial farewell. Just a nod, a bowed head, and that familiar look in his eyes—steadfast and sure.

The second: to deliver a sacred gift to the emerging Bahá'í community in Afghanistan—a special covering for the Shrine of the Báb. But this was more than fabric. It was a symbol. A living thread woven between the spiritual heart of the Bahá'í Faith and a community still finding its place, still carrying the scars of political uncertainty. That cloth carried with it a story, a duty, and a destiny. It felt as though history itself had handed us a lantern and asked us to keep it lit.

Years passed. Countries changed. So did we. But that thread never snapped.

In April 1972, I had the extraordinary fortune to witness a milestone that stitched together so many scattered years: the formation of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Afghanistan. It was a moment both historic and deeply personal. After years of pioneering and exile, of silence and longing, to see the Bahá'í community in Afghanistan take this step toward unity and self-governance was profoundly moving.

I remember the air in the room as the Assembly convened—charged not with fanfare but with purpose. There was a hush that settled over everyone, as if even the walls were listening. And then, during the inaugural session, that sacred covering—gifted by the Guardian and lovingly safeguarded by my father—was ceremoniously presented.

As it was unfolded, I recall the collective stillness. It felt as though the cloth itself carried the prayers of countless souls, the resilience of generations, and the quiet dignity of those who served not for recognition, but for love. It shimmered slightly in the light, not just with gold thread but with the weight of our shared history.

In that moment, it felt like a circle had closed. From the early days in Kabul as a child, to forced exile in Pakistan, to the sacred pilgrimage in the Holy Land, and then back—standing once more on Afghan soil, with a gift that bridged time, memory, and faith.

History has a curious way of knitting together the strands of purpose. What once felt fragmented—scattered like leaves in the wind—was suddenly part of a larger, purposeful design. And in the centre of it all, that gift. Not just the fabric, but the story it carried. A story we were now responsible for continuing.

A number of Baha'is at the first national convention in Afghanistan, April 1972. This photo was taken in Hazrat Al-Quds, Kabul. 18:52

Chapter Four : Fire in Our Hearts — Mass Teaching in Pakistan (1964–1973)

After returning to Iran from Pakistan, I completed my primary and secondary education—and then, somewhat to my surprise, found myself headed right back to Pakistan. This time, however, it was not as a displaced child, but as a hopeful medical student enrolled at Dow Medical College in Karachi. Life, it seems, has a fondness for full circles and unexpected encore performances.

Karachi in the mid-1960s was a whirlwind of contradictions: chaotic yet charming, dusty yet vibrant, serious yet pulsing with youth and energy. The city sweltered under an almost permanent sun, but it was never short of life. Its streets hummed with rickshaws and voices, and the scent of spice seemed to linger in the air as stubbornly as the heat. Amidst this backdrop, I found something unexpected and precious: a deeply vibrant Bahá’í youth community.

We were a lively bunch—idealistic, restless, and full of dreams that stretched far beyond exam results or career plans. Study sessions blurred into social gatherings, firesides flowed into late-night philosophical debates, and more often than not, someone would pull out a guitar. There was laughter, there was prayer, and most importantly, there was a sense of purpose that seemed to anchor all of us, even in a world that often felt unmoored.

The period from 1964 to 1973 was not only pivotal in my personal life—it marked a unique and electrifying chapter in global Bahá'í history. A powerful wave of mass teaching was sweeping across continents, fuelled by the bold vision of the Nine-Year Plan. Villages, towns, and cities were opening their hearts to the message of unity, and we, in Pakistan, felt swept up in that spiritual momentum.

A small group of us—young, passionate, occasionally over-caffeinated—embraced this movement with everything we had. We didn't just aim to fulfil the goals of the Nine-Year Plan. We set out to exceed them. Armed with little more than conviction, some well-worn shoes, and a whole lot of optimism, we travelled to remote areas, offered service, shared teachings, and, most importantly, listened.

I couldn't tell you the exact number of new believers who joined. We weren't keeping score. What mattered were the faces, the fires lit in distant towns, the quiet conversations on worn verandas, and the growing sense that something beautiful was taking root. The spirit was contagious.

Eventually, the community grew large and visible enough to draw the attention of the government. In a predominantly Muslim country like Pakistan, this was no small matter. And yet, in a surprising and deeply affirming development, the Bahá'í Faith received official recognition. This wasn't just a legal checkbox. It was a profound validation of years of sincere effort—of dusty roads, long train journeys, shared meals with strangers who became friends, and prayers whispered under starlit skies.

I remember one teaching trip vividly. We had travelled to a remote village where the power had gone out. Instead of cancelling the meeting, we lit lanterns and sat in a circle under the moonlight. A local elder, after listening in silence, leaned forward and said, "You speak of one God of one humanity. I have always believed this, but I never knew it had a name." That night, we didn't just teach—we connected, heart to heart, across culture, creed, and circumstance.

For those of us who lived through this time, it felt less like a campaign and more like a calling. We weren't out to win converts. We were sharing something that had transformed our own lives—and we watched, again and again, as it quietly transformed others.

Looking back, I can say without hesitation: it was one of the most spiritually energized periods of my life. A time when the future felt wide open, when friendships were forged in faith, and when love—genuine, action-driven love—was the fuel in our engines. We didn't know what lay ahead. But we knew we were part of something that mattered.

And that was more than enough.

Chapter Five: Commitment to Service

From my early days as a student in Pakistan—a country grappling with poverty, hunger, and an unforgiving climate—I've carried one unshakable belief: that service to humanity is the highest expression of purpose.

It wasn't a slogan stitched onto a school banner or a phrase I found in a dusty textbook. It came to life in small moments. A helping hand extended in a crowded clinic. A kind word offered to someone with more worries than they had room to carry. I witnessed how even the smallest act of care could ease suffering, restore dignity, and—in ways you might never see—transform lives.

That belief became the bedrock of everything I've done. Medicine was the natural home for it, of course. But it reached beyond the hospital walls—into dusty villages, across war zones, and through the complicated everyday moments of simply being human.

Here's the thing: life has a sneaky way of reminding us that grand plans and elegant philosophies are all well and good, but they often get

elbowed aside by life’s messier realities. That leak in the roof. The friend who won’t say they need you but clearly does. The mysteriously empty fridge two days before payday.

Long-term goals look great on vision boards. But the world? The world usually prefers same-day delivery—especially when it comes to compassion.

I’ve come to see that real service rarely involves heroic speeches or dramatic entrances. More often, it’s about showing up—under-caffeinated, over-committed, but willing. It’s resetting a router for the fifth time. Driving someone to an appointment without mentioning the traffic. Explaining how “the cloud” works to your elders with patience (and a lot of guessing).

The lesson, I think, is this: Life Favors those who respond—not just those who plan.

When someone’s struggling nearby, our greatest offering might not be a solution, but simply a presence. To show up, to stay kind, and—when appropriate—to make them laugh. That, more than any degree or diploma, has been my measure of success.

Between 1972 and 1990, I made the leap from Pakistan to the UK, leaving behind the comforts of home but carrying a medical degree, a stethoscope, and a suitcase full of ambition. I arrived in Britain as a qualified doctor, eager to pursue specialization in anaesthesia. In those days, becoming a consultant felt a bit like joining a travelling circus—junior doctors moved from hospital to hospital every 6 months to 2 years. It wasn’t uncommon to find yourself learning the names of three new consultants, a new cafeteria menu, and the route to the on-call room—all in the same week. It was a time of constant packing, unpacking, and wondering if your mail would ever find you again. Fortunately, modern training has grown more structured, and junior doctors today no longer need a travel agent to plan their career.

Still, I had a bit of a wandering spirit. Perhaps it was something ingrained in me from childhood—part refugee, part explorer, and part curious lunatic. In 1975, I took a leap and pioneered my way to Nigeria, where I spent over two remarkable years. Practicing anaesthesia there was both a challenge and an education—one that took me right back to the roots of the specialty. It was like stepping into a time machine and landing somewhere in the 1840s. We worked with ether and chloroform, and monitors were more myth than reality. The best monitor I had was my own hand—feeling for a pulse, watching pupils, and praying the patient kept breathing. It was medicine stripped to its essentials, and in hindsight, it was probably the best way to learn true vigilance and clinical judgment. Forget technology—our sharpest tool was our gut instinct.

After Nigeria, I returned to the UK with stories, skills, and a renewed sense of purpose. I continued my anaesthetic training, climbing the ladder rung by rung. But true to form, I couldn't resist the call of another adventure. So, in the early 1980s, I packed up again—this time heading west to Jamaica, drawn by sunshine, reggae, and of course, the opportunity to work in Kingston's bustling hospitals.

My experience in Jamaica was unlike anything I had encountered before. The sheer volume of trauma cases was astonishing. I anaesthetised for more gunshot wounds, stabbings, and machete injuries in two years than I would see in the next thirty years working in British hospitals. If my time in Nigeria was a lesson in improvisation, then Jamaica was a boot camp in crisis management. Every shift felt like a scene from a medical thriller—except the drama was real, and the only special effects were blood, adrenaline, and the occasional power cut.

Looking back, those pioneering years abroad taught me far more than textbooks ever could. They shaped me—not just as an anaesthetist, but as a person. They taught me resilience, adaptability, and how to find humour in the chaos. Because when you're holding a facemask with one hand, waving away mosquitoes with the other, and arguing with a generator that has suddenly decided to retire mid-operation—you either laugh, or you cry. I chose laughter. It's a great anaesthetic too, after all.

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Chapter Six: When Swindon in United Kingdom Met Ocotal in Nicaragua: A Tale of Twinning, Tacos, and Transformation

In September 1990, something quite unusual (and wonderful) happened: Swindon Borough Council officially twinned with Ocotal, a small town tucked away in the Nicaraguan mountains. On paper, it may have looked like a polite diplomatic nod—but in reality, it kicked off a truly remarkable chain of events. And I was lucky enough to be part of it.

Around the same time, a group in Swindon founded the Swindon-Ocotal Link (SOL)—a name that sounds like an energy company but was about people power. I had the pleasure of being a member for many years. We worked hard to build real, meaningful connections between Swindon

Borough Council, the people of Ocotal, and the wider Swindon community.

All that hard work led to a bold idea: why not go to Ocotal ourselves? So off we went—a group that included the then-Mayor of Swindon, Derique Montaut, some national radio journalists, local newspaper reporters, and a few of us in healthcare, including my good friends Dr. Kandia and Dr. Rostam Beheshti.

What followed was a week filled with celebration, new friendships, and some very enthusiastic dancing. But more than that, the partnership led to real change. Ocotal saw improvements in healthcare and even a feeding centre. What started as a symbolic handshake turned into a living, breathing bridge between two communities.

From then on, each summer became a kind of family reunion. People from Ocotal came to visit Swindon, and Swindonians packed their bags for Nicaragua. We laughed, we learned, and we often tried to explain Marmite (with mixed success).

The partnership didn't stop at ceremonies and visits. It *facilitated civic relationships* and long-term links between schools, hospitals, and community groups. Through tireless support and fundraising, SOL backed several development projects—including the building of a health centre, a school, housing, a nursery, and the now-iconic **Comedor Princess Diana** feeding and nursery centre, which still supports around 150 children.

We also funded an old people's home, provided emergency medical grants, and helped launch a women's project offering childcare-linked support—because solidarity, after all, starts at the grassroots.

SOL didn't shy away from getting its hands dirty either—literally. We organised volunteer work camps, youth visits, and cultural exchange programmes. Troupes from Ocotal even came to perform at festivals in Swindon, adding a little Latin flair to our Wiltshire summers.

And when disaster struck in 1998—Hurricane Mitch left a path of destruction across Central America—we rallied. Over £30,000 was raised, 7 tonnes of aid were shipped, and engineers from Swindon flew in to assess flood control options. Their findings laid the groundwork for much larger funding schemes to follow.

Art and culture weren't left out either. The partnership helped promote creative exchange, including mural projects at Lydiard Park Academy and exhibitions at the Link Centre, proving that even in public leisure centres, international friendship can be surprisingly colourful.

A year after that first visit, I returned to Nicaragua as a guest of Dr. Salmeron, the Minister of Health. Inspired by the Swindon-Ocotal success, we aimed to twin a Nicaraguan hospital with one in the United States. Ambitious? Yes. But it worked.

That second twinning created yet another bridge—between professionals, systems, and values. And it wasn't just about equipment or training. It was about connection. Learning. Resilience. Real, human solidarity.

One of my proudest keepsakes is a letter from the Nicaraguan Ambassador in London, written on behalf of President Violeta Chamorro. It acknowledged our efforts not as empty gestures, but as concrete, compassionate steps toward lasting, people-centered progress.

In a world that often builds walls, twinning reminded me that the best kind of healing—whether physical or spiritual—happens when we reach out, work together, and find joy in connection.

EMBAJADA DE NICARAGUA
EN
GRAN BRETAÑA

Dr. Parzin Rahmani
Southdown
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Wanborough
Swindon
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19th February 1991

Dear Dr. Rahmani

Pursuant to our telephone conversation, I would like to reiterate to you that the President of Nicaragua, Sra. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, personally received the letter you kindly sent her. She is most grateful for your decided interest in Nicaragua and asked me to convey this to you and to your colleagues. She also reiterated to me that the Government of Nicaragua would be more than happy to cover the transportation costs for any medical equipment/material donated. These would be carried via the Nicaraguan shipping line from one of the ports in Holland. The donation would have to be delivered to the port, and we would have to know in advance and mutually agree on the content of the shipment. There should be no duties on these kind of donations.

I hope we can pursue the idea of twinning Belén, a town in Rivas, Nicaragua where President Chamorro was born, with a sister town in Great Britain. Please let me know if you have any suggestions.

In the meantime, I avail myself of this opportunity to join the President and the Nicaraguan people in thanking you all for your interest in and assistance to our country.

Yours sincerely

Roberto Parrales
Ambassador

Ref: 036/91

Microsoft

Chapter Seven: Swindon — Building Community, One Heart at a Time

After two deeply rewarding years of pioneering in Jamaica (1980–1982), our family returned to the United Kingdom and made our home in Swindon, Wiltshire. It wasn’t long before this town—with its

roundabouts, railway heritage, and quietly resilient spirit—began to feel like our own little corner of purpose.

By 1983, Swindon marked a milestone: the formation of its very first Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly. It was the beginning of a vibrant and action-packed era—one where community-building became not just a noble idea, but a living, breathing reality. In those early years, we rolled up our sleeves (sometimes literally) and got to work. The Baha'is of Swindon didn't stay on the sidelines.

We engaged directly with local institutions, forging meaningful connections with the Borough Council and offering our voices—and hands—to civic life. Members of our community served on committees ranging from Racial Equality to Youth Affairs and Minority Advocacy. And of course, we brought our full hearts to Swindon's cherished twinning initiative with Ocotal, Nicaragua.

But perhaps one of the most beautiful contributions was something quietly transformative: the Tranquillity Zone.

Conceived by Derek and Sally Dacey and formally adopted by the Swindon Bahá'í community in the mid-1990s, the Tranquillity Zone was more than a program—it was a sanctuary. A simple, sacred space for meditation, prayer, and reflection. It welcomed everyone—exhausted parents, anxious teenagers, curious sceptics, and yes, even those who just needed to sit quietly with a cup of tea and remember how to breathe.

It soon became an emotional lifeline for many, especially the youth.

Together with the Discovery Zone, the Tranquillity Zone helped spark a wave of moral and social renewal across Wiltshire. And it didn't stop there. These grassroots efforts laid the foundation for something extraordinary: the Swindon Youth Empowerment Programme (SYEP).

Launched in the early 2000s, SYEP tackled a growing youth crisis head-on. Young people were battling fear, anxiety, and a creeping sense of isolation. SYEP met them where they were—with music, storytelling, mentorship, and service. More than 1,000 at-risk youth, referred by local agencies, participated. Many emerged not only transformed but reconnected—to themselves, to community, and to hope.

As Vivian Bartlett describes in *Nurturing Healthy Human Spirit in the Young*, this was a movement born not of policy but of presence. Of care. Of action. It was about listening more than lecturing, and creating spaces where young people felt seen, heard, and deeply valued.

Perhaps the most inspiring part? The complete unity of the Bahá'í community. From children with sparkly crafts to elders with well-earned wisdom, everyone had a place. Intergenerational collaboration wasn't

just encouraged—it was essential. In the Tranquillity Zone, you could just as easily find a teenager teaching meditation to a pensioner as the other way around.

To the many whose dedication breathed life into this dream—Mrs. Fidelma Meehan, Mrs. Neda Krishnan, Mr. Vivian Bartlett, Mr. Sahba Badii, and countless others—we offer our deepest thanks. You were the quiet heroes behind something truly magical.

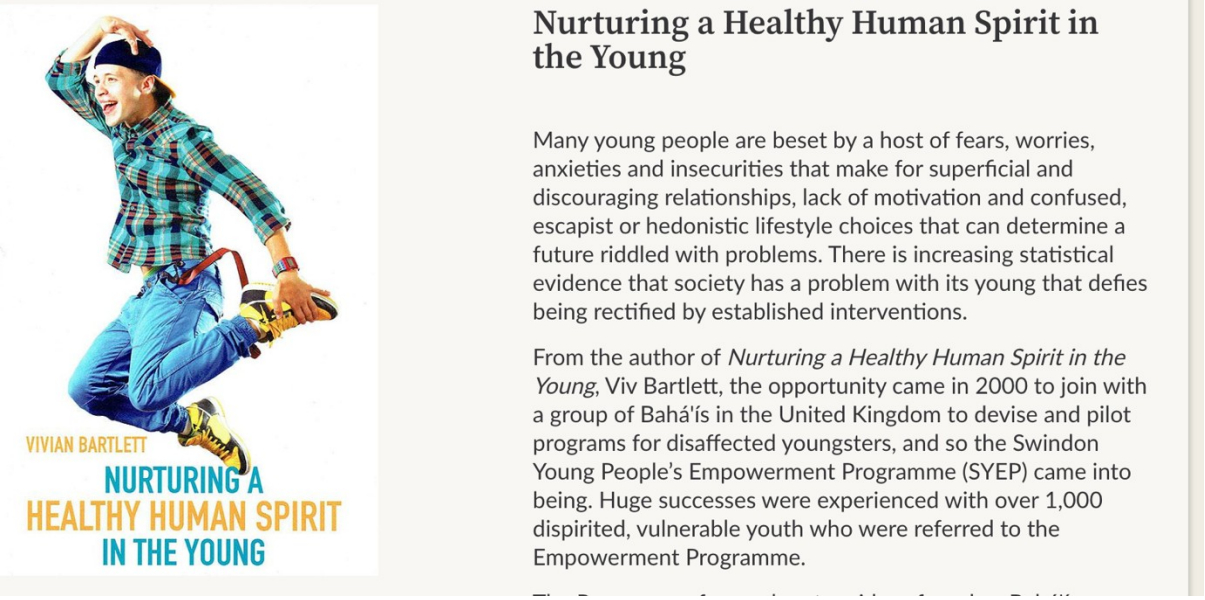
And yes, while Swindon might not appear in every travel guide, it became the launchpad for something global. The Tranquillity Zone and SYEP found new homes in communities around the world. Turns out, compassion and creativity are highly exportable commodities.

Swindon’s story is proof that when you mix spiritual values, a little stubborn optimism, and youthful energy, you don’t just build programs—you build something that lasts. Something that matters.

And honestly? Getting teenagers excited about service? That’s borderline wizardry.

Attached is video link prepared by BBC:

https://youtu.be/ep4YBw6gHO0?si=Mf1NcIwJ6jifqgnc


VIVIAN BARTLETT
NURTURING A
HEALTHY HUMAN SPIRIT
IN THE YOUNG
Nurturing a Healthy Human Spirit in the Young
Many young people are beset by a host of fears, worries, anxieties and insecurities that make for superficial and discouraging relationships, lack of motivation and confused, escapist or hedonistic lifestyle choices that can determine a future riddled with problems. There is increasing statistical evidence that society has a problem with its young that defies being rectified by established interventions.
From the author of *Nurturing a Healthy Human Spirit in the Young*, Viv Bartlett, the opportunity came in 2000 to join with a group of Bahá'ís in the United Kingdom to devise and pilot programs for disaffected youngsters, and so the Swindon Young People's Empowerment Programme (SYEP) came into being. Huge successes were experienced with over 1,000 dispirited, vulnerable youth who were referred to the Empowerment Programme.

Chapter Eight: Healing with Heart — The Guyana Medical Project

By the late 1980s, the Bahá'í community of Guyana—a lush, culturally rich country hugging the northern edge of South America—reached out to the UK Bahá'í Health Agency with a bold request: to help strengthen the country's struggling healthcare system.

It was a call for collaboration. And we answered with open hearts.

I had the privilege of representing the UK Bahá'í Health Agency to help coordinate this ambitious initiative. Alongside my trusted colleague and friend, Dr. Rostam Beheshti, I journeyed to Guyana—land of rivers, rainforests, and remarkable resilience.

We began with high-level consultations, including a meeting with the Honourable Hamilton Green, then Prime Minister of Guyana, as well as meaningful conversations with the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Guyana. Out of these discussions, a powerful and practical partnership was born—uniting the efforts of the Bahá'í community with Health for Humanity and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Together, we developed a comprehensive five-year medical development programme that aimed not just to provide short-term relief, but to lay the foundation for lasting transformation.

The outcomes were, quite frankly, extraordinary.

Medical and surgical equipment flowed into Guyana's hospitals. Eye surgeries—many life-changing—were performed by committed volunteer professionals. The main hospital in Georgetown and several others saw tangible upgrades to their infrastructure. Wards were improved, tools modernized, and training enhanced. In short: hope walked through the hospital doors wearing scrubs.

The impact was not only felt on hospital floors but also in hearts and headlines.

In 1993, Prime Minister Hamilton Green was invited to address the Bahá'í National Convention of the United States. Standing before a packed audience, he delivered an address that was as heartfelt as it was humorous. With genuine appreciation, he thanked the Bahá'í medical team for their tireless dedication—and couldn't help but note, with a smile, that the generosity had at times surpassed practicality.

"I must admit," he chuckled, "there were moments when even our Ministry of Health was asking, 'Where on earth are we going to put all this generosity?'"

His words, filled with warmth and sincerity, echoed what so many of us felt: this project wasn’t just about supplies or surgeries. It was about solidarity. It was about strangers becoming partners, and partners becoming friends.

A more detailed record of the Guyana Medical Project can still be found in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States. But for those of us who lived it, its legacy lives on—not in files, but in memories, lives touched, and the quiet knowledge that for five beautiful years, healing crossed borders and built bridges.

Meeting Prime Minister of Guyana with NSA of Guyana ,Dr Rostam Beheshti and Farzin Rahmani

PRIME Minister Hamilton Green with Dr. Rahmani (extreme right) and Dr. Behesti (second from right) at Monday night's reception.

Baha'is projects reflect what religion is all about

Two doctors, Farzin Rahmani, Anaesthesiologist, and Rustom Behesti, Orthopaedic Surgeon, from Britain, and members of the Baha'i Faith, have come to Guyana to conduct lectures and to work at the Georgetown Hospital for two weeks.

At a ceremony at the National Cultural Centre. Monday night to launch the project, Prime Minister Hamilton Green said that the coming of a Baha'i medical team to offer its services to Guyana, is a tangible demonstration of the ongoing concern that the Baha'is of Guyana have for the welfare of their countrymen.

He said the Baha'is of Guyana have always been involved in community-based projects' observing that this truly reflects what religion is all about, "God in action."

According to the Prime Minister, although the activity may appear insignificant, its importance lies in the "ripple effect" the project will have on other medical personnel and Guyana's own medical team on a whole.

"I hope to see that it infects your colleagues wherever you go with the same concern, enthusiasm and zeal which you show," he stated.

The report on our visit was gracious and very positive. The Prime Minister noted that this project truly reflects the essence of religion — 'God in action.' He also emphasized the significance of the project, highlighting its powerful 'ripple effect' in inspiring broader social change.

Chapter Nine: The Birth of a Vision — The Zambian Gems Foundation (2005)

Some journeys begin with a grand strategy, years of planning, and tidy timelines. Ours began with a suitcase full of medical supplies, a few hopeful hearts, and a flight to Zambia.

In 2005, what was meant to be a modest medical mission—led by my extraordinary wife Shida, our tireless friend Mr. Graham Walker, and myself—quickly spiralled into something far bigger than we had ever imagined. What started as a focused act of service became a full-fledged movement. Thus, the Zambian Gems Foundation was born—not from bureaucracy, but from boots on the ground, hands in action, and hearts wide open.

Spoiler alert: it didn't stay small for long.

Before we knew it, we were knee-deep in projects—healthcare outreach, community development, education, capacity-building—you name it. The beautiful chaos of it all became our new normal. The to-do list grew faster than we could tick boxes, but somehow, that only energized us more. We had stumbled into something that mattered, and there was no turning back.

But this journey wasn't just powered by good intentions. It was inspired—fuelled, really—by the examples of two towering Zambian figures whose lives embodied dignity, courage, and compassion.

We pay heartfelt tribute to Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first President and the beloved Father of the Nation. His moral clarity, humility, and devotion to his people laid the foundation of modern Zambia. His leadership wasn't about dominance; it was about service. About unity. About believing, stubbornly and beautifully, that a better world was not only possible—but necessary.

We also honour Dr. Fred M'membe, the visionary founder of *The Post Newspaper*, a fearless journalist, principled politician, and tireless philanthropist. His unwavering commitment to truth and justice—especially when it was inconvenient or dangerous—has been a moral compass for our work in Zambia. He didn't just write about change; he lived it.

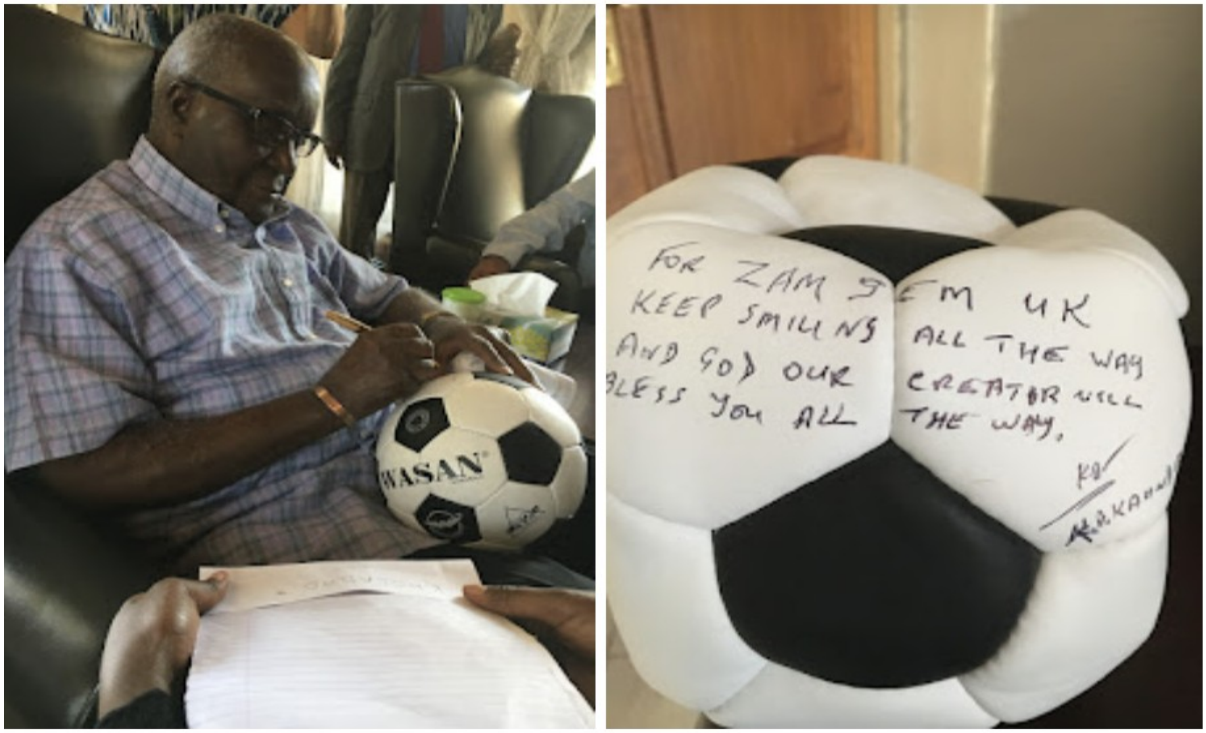
With role models like these, how could we not do more?

The Zambian Gems Foundation has since become a tapestry of partnerships, projects, and people—all bound by a shared belief in human dignity and the power of collective action. We've faced our fair share of

challenges (and bureaucratic curveballs), but every smile, every healed wound, every empowered child reminds us why we started.

And the name? "Zambian Gems" wasn't just poetic—though it does have a nice ring to it. It was our way of recognizing the true treasures of Zambia: its people.

Visiting Dr Kenneth Kaunda as he always loved visiting children from our orphanage



The photo above captures a heartfelt moment of gratitude by Dr Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia’s Father of Nation , A powerful reminder of how a simple act of kindness can bring so much joy

Long lasting friendship with Dr. Fred M’membe, the visionary proprietor of *The Post* Newspaper, a courageous politician and devoted philanthropist

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Chapter Ten: The Stamp of Trust — Official Charity Status (2010)

By 2010, after several whirlwind years of grassroots projects, last-minute logistics, and more than a few suitcase surgeries, the Zambian Gems Foundation reached a major milestone: official recognition by the UK Charity Commission.

Now, some might see this as a bureaucratic detail—a bit of necessary paperwork. But for us, It was a public declaration of trust, a stamp of credibility that said to the world: *Yes, this is real. Yes, this matters. And yes, you can help.*

Charity registration meant we could now expand our reach, access international support, and operate on a more stable and sustainable foundation. It meant our donors could give with confidence. It meant we could dream a little bigger, plan a little further ahead—and finally stop explaining why we weren't on the official government charity list yet.

Behind this achievement was a team of passionate, persistent, paper-wrangling champions who believed in the vision as fiercely as they believed in the people it served. Registering a charity is not for the faint of heart. The forms alone could cause mild dizziness. But we got there—because the mission deserved it.

And let's be honest, there was something oddly satisfying about seeing *The Zambian Gems Foundation* listed on that official government website. A bit like watching your child graduate—only your child is a dynamic, community-driven, healthcare-empowering, border-crossing miracle in nonprofit form.

This moment gave us more than credibility. It gave us momentum.

With our new legal status in hand, we could deepen our partnerships, increase transparency, and build long-term strategies that would allow the work to outlive us. This was never about quick wins. It was about building something that could last—something worthy of the people and places that inspired it.

And now, with the paperwork blessed and the mission endorsed, the journey continued—only now, with a bit more wind beneath our wings.

Chapter Eleven: Two Decades of Doing — 20 Years of Impactful Achievements

After we officially launched the Zambian Gems Foundation, something unexpected happened.

The requests poured in—from Zambia's ministries, from the Bahá'í community, from local schools and hospitals, and sometimes just from kind-hearted people who kicked us into gear whether we were ready or not. Each invitation sparked a new initiative, a new collaboration, or a new logistical juggling act we somehow managed to pull off .

In the 20 years since those early days, we've worked on medical outreach programs, surgical missions, maternal health education, school infrastructure, clean water access.

Some of our proudest moments?

- Delivering essential medical equipment to rural hospitals that hadn't seen upgrades in decades.
- Training local health workers to carry on the work long after we left.
- Collaborating with traditional leaders and faith communities to build trust and ensure lasting change.
- Empowering women and youth through hands-on education and leadership programs. And perhaps most rewarding of all—watching local heroes rise, lead, and transform their own communities.

None of this was in our original "plan," because truthfully, there never was a detailed master plan. Just a deep belief in the power of service, a pile of suitcases that somehow always got heavier, and a willingness to say "yes" when the moment called.

Twenty years in, and the list of achievements is too long to fit neatly on a page. But the heart of it remains simple: we showed up, we served, and we stood beside people as they transformed their own futures.

And we’re not done yet.

Some of our projects include:
– Construction and support of Blessed Vale School in Chibolya Zambia.
– Construction of a new St Cecilia Orphanage for over 40 orphans in Mapepe Zambia.
– Established a farm, Construction of accommodation plus storage space, Equipped with irrigation equipment aimed to supplement food supply and source of income for the St Cecilia orphanage.
– Support of secondary school education for orphanage students.
– Financial support to over 27 students from different parts of Zambia to study at colleges and universities.
– Construction of Stepping Stone School in Mumbwa offering education for special need children.
– Supporting De Santo centre for deaf children in Livingstone Zambia
– Construction of HIV help and training centre in Cross Road, Cape Town, South Africa.
– Supply of a large quantity of sport equipment to Zambia.
– Construction of an Intensive Care Unit in Banjul, The Gambia.
– Since late 2021 Zambian Gems in partnership with local partners engaged with girls education in Afghanistan.
– “Care Skill” program, Produced by Zambian Gems Foundation, A basic health care training and certification from a reputable United Kingdom certifying authority.
– “Young Entrepreneur Scheme” Produced by Zambian Gems Foundation offering basic knowledge and requirements for a successful business, Translated in 4 languages and available for global use.
Overview of Zambian Gems Activities by 2020

Chapter Twelve: A Place to Bring Life — The Maternity Centre

Dr Farzin Rahmani reports

Of all the projects launched by the Zambian Gems Foundation, one holds a particularly special place in our hearts — not only because of the lives it touches every single day, but because of the powerful story behind it. This is the story of how a once-forgotten rural clinic became a thriving maternity centre — a place where new life enters the world with safety, dignity, and a little less chaos than before.

Let’s be honest: maternal care in rural Zambia hasn’t always been a walk in the park. For many expectant mothers in remote communities, giving birth can feel less like a celebration and more like a gamble. Distance to the nearest clinic? Sometimes over 50 kilometres. Cost of transport? Often unaffordable. Medical equipment? Limited, if not non-existent. Qualified staff? Scarce. Sterile conditions? We’d rather not talk about it.

In far too many cases, something as natural as childbirth became a crisis waiting to happen. Complications that should have been manageable turned tragic — not because the knowledge or solutions didn’t exist, but simply because access did not.

Then one day, we came across a small local clinic — a place that was clearly trying its best, but struggling against the odds. The building was run-down. Supplies were nearly non-existent. Staff were few and overworked. From the outside, it didn’t look like much. Honestly, it barely looked open.

But we didn’t see failure. We saw potential. We saw a spark. We saw what could be, if only someone believed in it enough.

So we did.

With the help of community leaders (whose enthusiasm could power a small village), dedicated medical professionals, generous donors, and a small army of local volunteers, the Zambian Gems Foundation took on the clinic as a flagship project. And then the real work began.

Floors were cleaned. Walls were patched and painted. Ceilings were repaired so the rainy season would stop making surprise visits during delivery. Brand-new medical equipment was brought in — from delivery beds to incubators to that strange-looking suction device we’re still figuring out how to use properly. Old, rusted tools were replaced with sterile, safe, state-of-the-art supplies. And most importantly, we invested in training, staffing, and long-term support to ensure the improvements would last longer than just a photo op.

Little by little, the transformation took shape. What was once a struggling outpost become a sanctuary. A place of peace, care, and skilled support. A place where mothers could walk in scared — and walk out with a newborn in their arms and a story to tell.

And the best part? We weren’t alone in this mission.

During my most recent visit to Zambia — specifically to our now-thriving Lwimba Clinic — I was excited to discover a brand-new development: the Zambian government had just completed construction of a modern hospital nearby. Rather than overshadowing our work, this new facility

complements our maternity centre beautifully. It’s like we planted the seed, and now the garden is growing.

Together, our centre and the new hospital create a continuum of care. Mothers can begin their prenatal journey at our clinic, deliver in a safe and supportive environment, and then access extended healthcare services at the larger hospital if needed. It's a public-private partnership without the paperwork, powered by mutual purpose and shared compassion.

What started as a patchwork project with peeling paint and flickering hope is now a fully functioning maternity centre — a beacon for mothers, families, and entire communities.

Of course, there’s still more to do — there always is. We hope to grow, adding postnatal education programs and a few small comforts, like a working kettle and chairs that don’t sound haunted. But today, we take a moment to appreciate how far we’ve come.

We believed in it. And now, so does everyone else.

Because at the heart of it all, this isn’t just about bricks, beds, or budgets.

It’s about life. And giving every mother the chance to bring it into the world safely — with care, with confidence, and maybe even with a bit of laughter.

The little clinic in this rural. Village was subject to refurbishment and improved surgical equipment

New hospital accessible to Lwimba village

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Chapter Thirteen: A School Called Hope — The Blessed Vale Story

In 2006, during one of our earlier visits to Zambia, we met a woman who would forever shift the course of our work—and, as it turned out, the future of hundreds of children.

Her name was Beauty Lexis Nzila.

She was intelligent, grounded, and quietly powerful—the kind of leader who doesn't raise her voice but commands attention through her sheer presence. Beauty was running a small, under-resourced school in Chibolya, a township facing more than its fair share of challenges. Yet her vision was clear: provide children with a real education, not just a place to pass the time.

We sat in her modest classroom, surrounded by handwritten posters, the smell of chalk, and the determined energy of possibility. It was impossible not to be moved by her purpose.

And so, the Zambian Gems Foundation said yes.

What began as a modest partnership quickly blossomed into something extraordinary. We offered what we could—materials, training,

encouragement—and she turned it into momentum. Together, we nurtured what would become Blessed Vale School.

Today, that once-struggling school serves more than 600 students. Its classrooms are equipped, its teachers trained, and its students—many of whom walk miles to attend—are thriving. What was once a fragile hope has become a cornerstone of the community.

Several former students have gone on to graduate from university, becoming teachers, nurses, and professionals contributing meaningfully to society. And perhaps most moving of all, some of them have returned to Chibolya—to mentor, to teach, to lift others the way they were once lifted.

Walking through Blessed Vale now, you'll see children confidently reciting poetry, solving maths problems, and laughing in the playground. But you'll also feel something else: a quiet revolution. A place where hope is no longer hypothetical—it's institutionalized.

We're proud—deeply proud—to have walked alongside Beauty and the community of Blessed Vale. And we continue to believe, with everything we've got, in the power of education to uplift not just students, but entire generations.

Old Blessed Vale School

Opening ceremony of new Blessed Vale School with 6 new classrooms

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Chapter Fourteen: A New Home for Hope — Stepping Stone School, Mumbwa

In May 2019, Shida Rahmani , Farzin Rahmani and a group of students from St Cecilia orphanage were invited to the town of Mumbwa, Zambia a modest yet spirited community about three hours' drive west of Lusaka. The occasion? The opening of a new school. But not just any school—Stepping Stone School, a learning centre dedicated to children with special needs.

We arrived expecting to witness a humble beginning. What we found was a story of courage, commitment, and quiet revolution, led by a woman whose strength far outpaced her physical limitations.

Suzan, the founder and head teacher of Stepping Stone, uses a wheelchair. That alone, in a town with limited accessibility and few resources, would deter most people. But not Suzan. Her vision was clear, her spirit unshakable, and her classroom was filled with children who, in

most places, might have been forgotten—but here, were being celebrated.
At that time, the school operated out of a rented building—simple, cramped, and lacking in facilities. But it pulsed with purpose. Suzan's leadership, her compassion, and her refusal to let society's limits define her students made it impossible to ignore the impact of her work.
Over the next two years, with collaboration, care, and a growing circle of support, Stepping Stone School transformed—both in form and in future. And on 25 November 2021, we gathered once again in Mumbwa for a remarkable occasion: the official opening of the school's new, purpose-built facility.

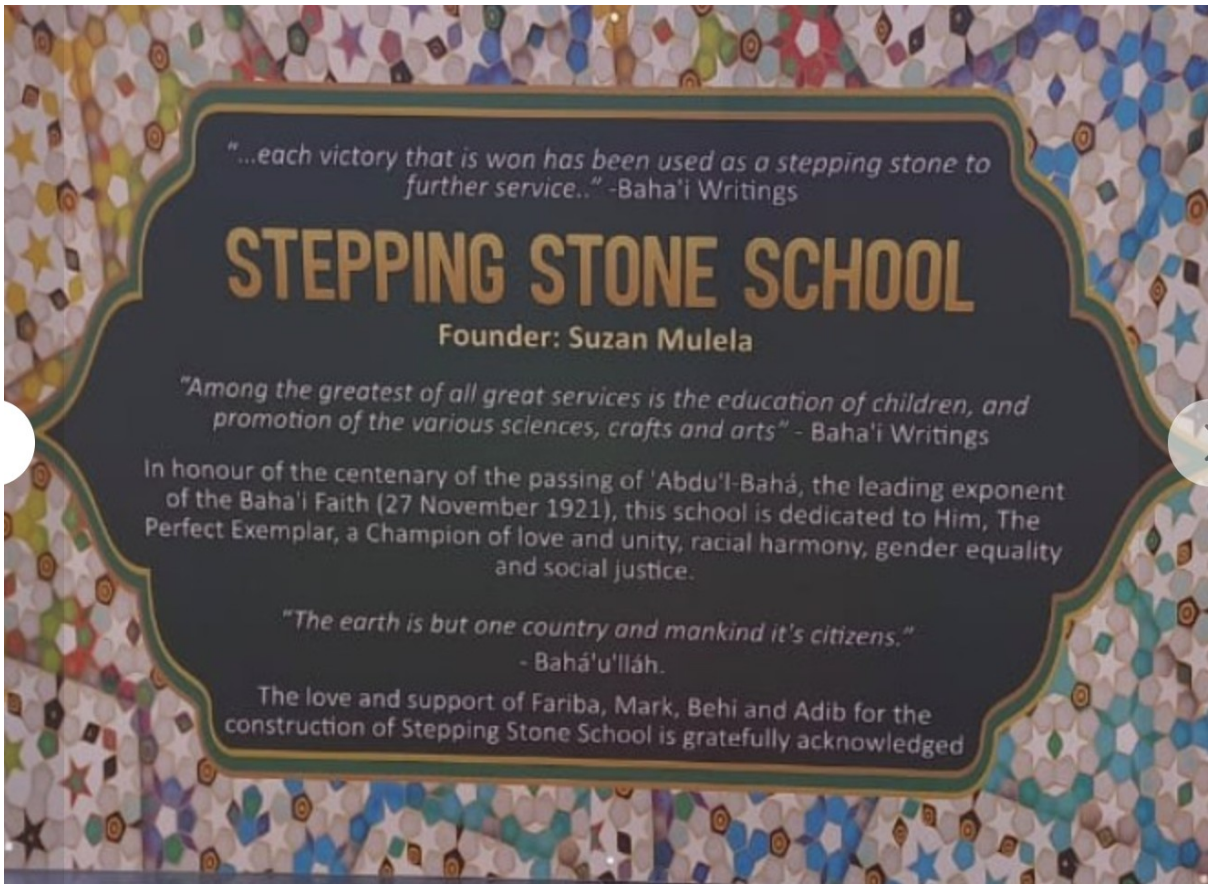
It was a milestone that felt even more profound because it coincided with the 100th anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—a guiding light in the Bahá'í Faith,
Abdul Baha promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife.

This wasn't just the dedication of a building. It was the realization of a dream. A statement that children with special needs deserve more than sympathy—they deserve space, structure, support, and every opportunity to thrive.

A special note of gratitude belongs to Mrs. Fariba Westwood Taheri of Brighton, UK. Her generous financial backing and heartfelt belief in Suzan's vision were instrumental in turning this dream into a vibrant reality. Her support helped lay the bricks, but it also lifted hearts—and that's something no blueprint can plan for.

Today, Stepping Stone School stands not just as a building, but as a beacon. A place where children who were once overlooked are now seen, heard, and empowered. And where a teacher in a wheelchair became a symbol of what's possible when determination meets community.

Stepping Stone for children with learning difficulties for 50+ students


"...each victory that is won has been used as a stepping stone to further service.." -Baha'i Writings
STEPPING STONE SCHOOL
Founder: Suzan Mulela
"Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts" - Baha'i Writings
In honour of the centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leading exponent of the Baha'i Faith (27 November 1921), this school is dedicated to Him, The Perfect Exemplar, a Champion of love and unity, racial harmony, gender equality and social justice.
"The earth is but one country and mankind it's citizens."
- Bahá'u'lláh.
The love and support of Fariba, Mark, Behi and Adib for the construction of Stepping Stone School is gratefully acknowledged

Quotation from Abdul ’Baha about importance of education blessing Stepping Stone School

Stepping Stone students ,Mumbwa, Zambia

Chapter Fifteen: A Language for Hope — The DeSanto Centre for the Deaf

In 2002, a simple but powerful question changed the course of one woman's life—and, as it turns out, the lives of countless others:

"Deaf children in America have resources—what do deaf children in Africa have?"

That question led Lisa Zahra, an American Sign Language interpreter from the United States, on a journey that would take her far beyond any textbook or training room. It brought her to Zambia, to rural villages where silence didn't simply mean peace—it meant isolation. It meant children unable to communicate even with their own families. It meant a whole generation growing up without language, education, or recognition.

What began as short-term volunteer work in Monze quickly became a life's calling.

In 2015, Lisa established the DeSanto Centre for the Deaf in Livingstone—the first and only school in the region dedicated solely to the education of deaf children. Her work is rooted not just in teaching language, but in building bridges—between children and families, between silence and self-expression, between exclusion and empowerment.

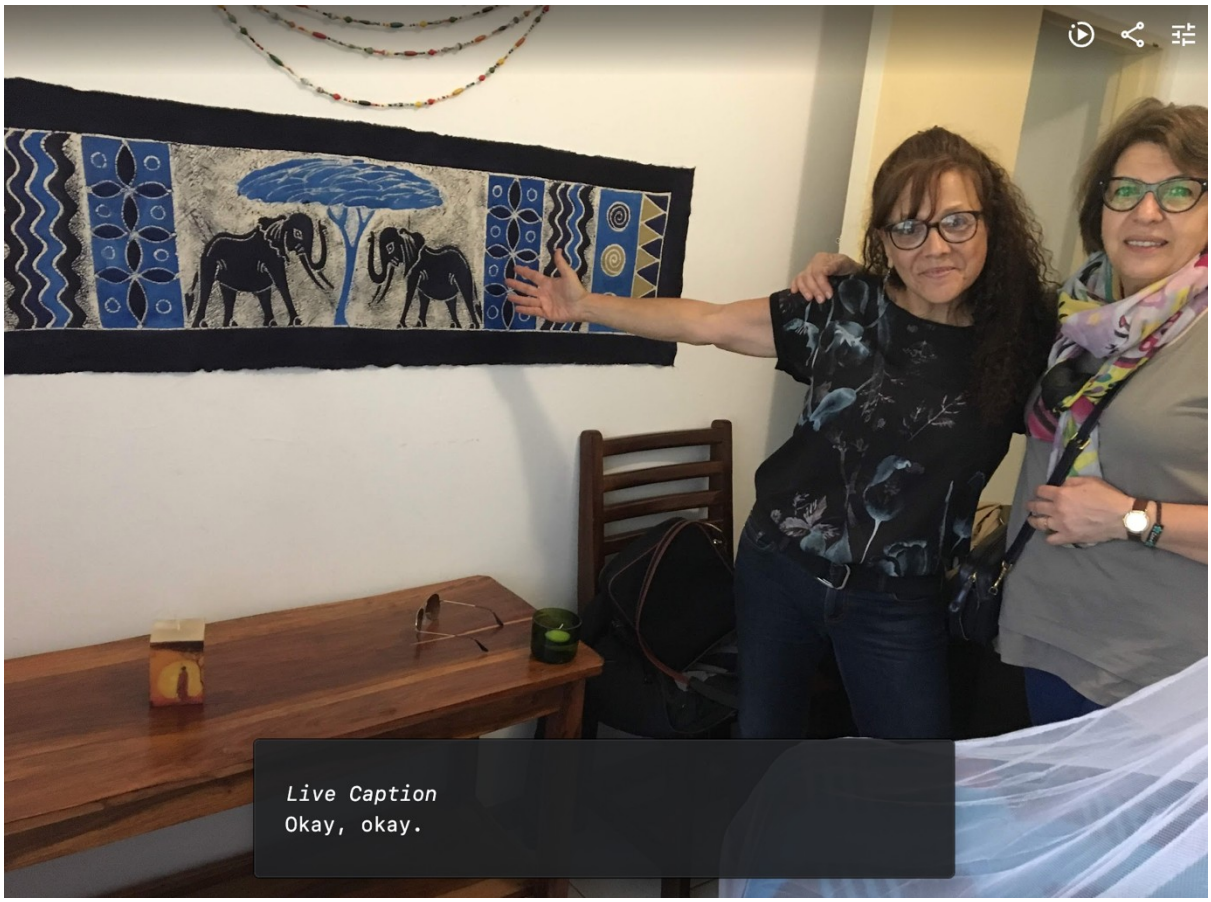
The school has become a sanctuary of soundless discovery. Students not only learn to sign—they learn to thrive. They gain confidence, friendships, dignity. And perhaps most importantly, they realize they are not forgotten.

Lisa's commitment is rare. She has remained a volunteer, living modestly, drawing only a small stipend to ensure that every possible resource goes toward the children. Her days are long, her challenges many—but her joy is evident in every proud gesture and every signed conversation.

Shida and I make it a point to visit Lisa whenever we're in Zambia. Her dedication and humility inspire us each time. On one of those visits, Shida took the lead in organizing a fundraising campaign—the goal: to purchase a minibus for the school. Thanks to that effort, the students of DeSanto now have reliable, safe transportation, a game-changer for accessibility and attendance.

Watching the children arrive each day—waving, smiling, signing with excitement—reminds us that even a small vehicle can carry a great deal of hope.

Lisa’s story is a profound reminder that change often begins with a question, but it grows through courage, community, and unwavering conviction. She invites the world not to simply admire her work, but to join her—to stand for a world where every child, deaf or hearing, is given the tools to communicate, connect, and contribute.



Lisa Zahra and Shida in DeSanto Centre

Students celebrating arrival of their minibus !

Chapter Sixteen: Seeds of Hope — St. Cecilia Orphanage and the Model Farm

Tucked away in a quiet part of Zambia is a place where hope is planted daily—sometimes with books, sometimes with seeds. That place is St. Cecilia Orphanage, a home built not just with bricks, but with compassion, endurance, and unwavering love.

At the heart of this home is Cecilia—a woman whose life's work is nothing short of heroic. A tireless humanitarian, she has spent years nurturing and protecting Zambia's most vulnerable children, offering not just shelter, but dignity. Her orphanage is more than a refuge; it's a launchpad for life.

When we first encountered Cecilia and her extraordinary work, we knew immediately that we wanted to be part of her journey. The Zambian Gems Foundation proudly partnered with her to support the daily operations and long-term goals of the orphanage—goals that stretch far beyond basic care and into the realm of possibility.

One of the most impactful initiatives has been the creation of a model farm—a living classroom and a self-sustaining lifeline.

The farm provides the orphanage with fresh, nutritious produce, reducing reliance on external food supplies and improving the children's health. But it's more than food—it's empowerment. Residents and members of the surrounding community receive hands-on training in sustainable agriculture, gaining skills that not only feed families but also foster independence and resilience.

From learning how to cultivate maize and vegetables to managing livestock, the young people on this farm are growing far more than crops —they're growing futures.

Thanks to Cecilia's leadership, the support of generous donors, and the strength of a shared vision, over 15 of the orphanage's children have gone on to pursue higher education. Now they have completed their studies in medicine, nursing, agriculture, education, and more—taking what they've learned and turning it into service for others.

Each graduate is a powerful reminder that circumstances do not define destiny. With love, opportunity, and a few seeds of belief, the trajectory of a life—and an entire community—can be transformed.

St. Cecilia Orphanage is not just a place. It is a movement of quiet, consistent kindness. And it's a privilege to walk alongside Cecilia, whose legacy is being written not in headlines, but in the hearts and lives of the children she serves.

Birth of the St Cecilia Orphanage

Life of the St Cecilia orphanage

Chapter Seventeen: A Promise Kept — First ICU in The Gambia

a quiet but profound request changed the course of my life—and ultimately, the lives of many others.

A compassionate couple from the United Kingdom, who had spent years visiting and falling in love with The Gambia, reached out to me. Over the years, they had formed bonds with the people and culture, immersing themselves in the beauty, warmth, and challenges of the country. The wife, Shahin, was now facing a terminal illness. Though her body grew weaker, her spirit remained remarkably strong. Travel was no longer possible for her, but her thoughts never strayed far from the land and people she had come to cherish deeply.

She asked me, simply and sincerely, “Can you go on my behalf, and do something meaningful there?”

It was a question that pierced the heart—not just a request, but a quiet plea to continue what she no longer could. Her words carried a gentle urgency, the kind that arises when time is precious. Not long afterward, Shahin passed away, leaving behind not only a legacy of kindness but also a powerful wish.

In January 2012, I honoured her final request. I made two journeys to The Gambia. The second time, I was joined by an extraordinary team: Mrs. Guilda Walke, Mr. Graham Walker, my beloved wife Shida Rahmani, and Farzin Rahmani. From the very beginning, what started as a gesture of remembrance soon blossomed into something far greater—a mission of hope, healing, and transformation.

During our time there, we immersed ourselves in understanding the true needs of the healthcare system. We met with frontline medical professionals, dedicated hospital staff, administrators, and senior officials from the Ministry of Health. Through their stories, we heard the painful truth: critically ill patients in The Gambia had no real access to intensive care. The absence of even basic ICU services meant that many lives were lost—lives that could have been saved with timely intervention. For families and healthcare workers alike, the helplessness was heartbreaking.

Then, something remarkable happened.

The initiative caught the attention of the highest levels of leadership. The President of The Gambia, upon learning of our efforts and intentions, personally endorsed the project. He encouraged us to pursue a vision that the country had never realized before: the creation of its very first Intensive Care Unit.

We knew this was more than just a technical or logistical challenge. It was a moral imperative. With every conversation, every site visit, and every moment of planning, our resolve grew stronger. We were not just building a facility—we were planting the seeds of lasting change.

By May 2013, that vision became a reality.

The country’s first-ever Intensive Care Unit opened its doors at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul. It stood not only as a physical structure, but as a symbol of what is possible when love, purpose, and action come together. For the first time, critically ill

patients had a real chance. Families had hope. And a new standard of care began to take root.
Following its successful launch, the President instructed the Minister of Health to appoint two overseas intensivists to run and mentor the ICU team. This marked an important shift—proof that what was once a hopeful dream had evolved into a fully functioning, government-supported medical centre.
This extraordinary achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our beloved friend, Mr. Faramarz Shams, and his family. Their generosity, commitment, and belief in the project gave it the strength to cross oceans and overcome barriers. They were not merely donors; they were visionaries who stood with us every step of the way.
For me, this ICU will forever carry Shahin's spirit. Every monitor beep, every life saved, every patient given a second chance is a testament to her enduring love. It is a reminder that even in our final days, we can inspire movements that ripple across borders and generations. Sometimes, a single voice—soft, sincere, and full of heart—can spark a transformation that outlives us all.

Final preparations for the official opening of the first Intensive Care unit in Banjul ,The Gambia

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Chapter Eighteen: Growing Leaders — A Decade with Starfish International, The Gambia

Over more than a decade of visiting Starfish International in The Gambia, I've been consistently struck by one enduring truth: real change begins when values meet action.
It's easy to speak of empowerment, progress, or transformation. But to see it—year after year, etched in the eyes of young girls stepping boldly into their own futures—is something else entirely. Starfish was founded with a bold vision: to cultivate leadership and self-reliance, particularly among young women. But what it has become is even more remarkable—a beacon of integrated development rooted in community, dignity, and relentless hope.

At its heart, Starfish stands on three transformative pillars: health, agriculture, and education. Each one is not just a programmatic offering, but a living, breathing act of service. Each time I've returned, I haven't just seen progress—I've seen lives being lifted, quietly and consistently.

Health: Building Healthier Communities

Starfish begins where all sustainable progress must—with health. The organization deeply understands that good health isn't just a blessing—it's a foundation. Without it, the rest crumbles. With it, anything is possible.

Through powerful collaborations with both local practitioners and international volunteers, Starfish delivers health education that is holistic and culturally sensitive. From reproductive health and hygiene to nutrition, mental wellness, and first aid, these lessons go beyond textbook knowledge—they become practical tools of empowerment.

I've sat in sessions where a girl, no older than thirteen, asked thoughtful, informed questions that would make a physician pause. I've watched mothers join the conversations, their curiosity piqued by what their daughters were bringing home. The ripple effect is real.
And the message is clear: when people understand their own bodies, they can protect their own dignity. When they care for themselves, they begin to lift others with them.

Agriculture: Growing Sustainable Futures

The agriculture work at Starfish is more than food production. It's a declaration: that knowledge of the land is a form of power, and that self-sufficiency is a stepping stone to freedom.
In these fields and gardens—under sun-baked skies and red soil—the students dig, plant, water, and harvest. They learn not only about composting and sustainable techniques, but also about the patience and persistence that growth requires.
One young girl told me, proudly holding a handful of tomatoes, "We're feeding our school now. Next, maybe our village." That's not just farming—it's foresight.

The agricultural programs have become platforms for practical science, teamwork, entrepreneurship, and environmental stewardship. They remind each participant: the future doesn't arrive—it's cultivated.

Education: Empowering Minds, Changing Lives

At its core, Starfish is an educational movement. But not the kind defined by rows of desks or rote memorization. This is an education of the whole person—mind, heart, and spirit.
Traditional academics are only the starting point. Students are immersed in leadership training, entrepreneurship, creative writing, technology, public speaking, and service. The goal is not to produce top scorers—but thoughtful citizens who will shape their communities with courage and integrity.

There's a special kind of spark in a Starfish classroom. A mix of seriousness and joy. A blend of curiosity and compassion. Girls speak with confidence, not arrogance. They challenge ideas respectfully. They dream—big.

And the results? Tangible. Girls who once hesitated to raise their hands now run their own initiatives. Some have gone on to study abroad, others to serve their communities at home with newfound pride and purpose.
Conclusion: A Legacy of Love in Action

Every visit to Starfish International reaffirms what I've long believed: that when service is rooted in principle and shaped by love, it changes everything.
Starfish is not just an organization—it's a living testimony to what's possible when belief becomes behaviour. It doesn't just grow vegetables—it grows visionaries. It doesn't just offer lessons—it offers liberation.
To witness this work is to be reminded of our shared responsibility. That no one is too small to make a difference, and no one too distant to matter.
In a world that often feels fractured, Starfish quietly stitches lives together—one seed, one lesson, one girl at a time.
And in doing so, it reminds us that the most powerful revolutions are the ones carried out with humility, community, and joy.

Students of Starfish International

With Starfish co-founder Dr Yassin Sarr

In September 2022, we met 10 students from the Banjul School of Nursing. These students needed support to complete their nursing program and receive their qualifications on time. Thanks to financial assistance from Zambian Gems, they were able to complete their studies and qualify.

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Chapter Nineteen: Planting the Seeds of Enterprise — Starfish's First Junior Entrepreneurs

Over ten years ago, a group of bright, ambitious students from Starfish International in The Gambia did something remarkable. They didn't just dream of a better future—they started building it.

That year, we proudly introduced our Junior Entrepreneur Scheme with the first group of Starfish students, who earned official certificates of completion and ignited a passion for self-reliance, creativity, and leadership.

It was a milestone not just for them, but for all of us who believe in education with purpose—in nurturing young minds not only to learn, but to lead. These students, many of whom were the first in their families to receive any form of formal leadership training, stepped into unfamiliar territory with enthusiasm and determination. They were eager not only to understand business principles, but to reimagine what success could mean for their families, communities, and country.

At the heart of their journey was Ramez Krishnan from the UK—a mentor with patience, passion, and a gift for bringing out the best in others. Ramez generously volunteered his time and wisdom, guiding the students through the program's many challenges and breakthroughs. His

mentorship was not just academic—it was personal, transformational, and enduring.

The program taught more than profit margins and business plans. It cultivated confidence, teamwork, and resilience. It showed students how to pitch ideas, manage projects, think creatively, and solve problems with resourcefulness and integrity. And perhaps most importantly, it showed them that entrepreneurship isn't about individual gain—it's about community impact.

Graduation day was filled with pride, celebration, and more than a few happy tears. These young entrepreneurs stood tall, certificates in hand, their futures forever altered—not just because they had completed a course, but because they had proven to themselves what they were capable of.

This was only the beginning.

Since then, the spirit of the Junior Entrepreneur Scheme has continued to ripple outward—its graduates going on to lead initiatives, support their families, and serve as role models for the next generation. Their success reminds us that when you invest in young people, you invest in transformation.

And to Ramez, we owe more than thanks. We owe a chapter of this journey that may have started with spreadsheets and business models—but ended with a legacy of hope.

Congratulations to the First Starfish International Cohort!

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Chapter Twenty: Compassion in Action — The Neda Centre, Cape Town

In the heart of Crossroads—one of Cape Town's most underserved, densely populated, and resilient townships—stands a sanctuary built not with bricks alone, but with empathy, understanding, and courage: the Neda Centre.

Crossroads has long carried the weight of hardship—economic, social, and emotional. But within its close-knit community also lives extraordinary strength. The Neda Centre, founded by the Zambian Gems Foundation, rose in response to a need that was urgent, complex, and deeply human: the need for healing in the face of HIV/AIDS—not just of the body, but of hearts, relationships, and identities.

In a region where stigma still speaks louder than science, and where silence often cloaks suffering, the Neda Centre is a place where the unspeakable is spoken with grace—and where every visitor is met with dignity.

Named in honour of a soul whose life radiated kindness, the Neda Centre offers more than services. It offers sanctuary.

Its mission rests on four transformative pillars:

- Prevention: Raising awareness and promoting safe practices through honest, respectful, and culturally rooted education. By empowering individuals with accurate information, the Centre helps them protect themselves and their loved ones with confidence instead of fear.

- Education: Through schools, community gatherings, and direct outreach, the Centre helps dispel myths and break down generational walls of misinformation. Children, parents, and elders learn together—replacing stigma with clarity, and shame with collective understanding.

- Psychosocial Support: At the heart of the Centre is a deep belief in the power of emotional healing. Counselors and peer supporters offer a listening ear and a steady presence to those navigating the complex emotional terrain of HIV—a journey often marked by isolation, grief, or fear.

- Community Empowerment: The Centre's approach is never top-down. It trains local leaders, equips volunteers, and draws on the wisdom already present in Crossroads to create a network of compassion from within. The result is a model of care that feels familiar, trusted, and rooted in community values.

Every day, the Centre opens its doors to those who have too often been met with silence or rejection elsewhere. Young women uncertain about their future. Fathers unsure how to speak to their sons. Grandmothers raising children born into a world they never imagined. All are welcomed—not for what they carry, but for who they are.

And perhaps most powerfully, many of the Centre's staff and volunteers are from the community itself. They understand its rhythms and struggles, because they've lived them. They know that healing does not begin in a clinic. It begins with trust.

I have seen, firsthand, how this place changes lives—not through medicine, but through love. It's in the classroom where students laugh while learning truths once wrapped in taboo. It's in the support circle where strangers become allies. It's in the moment someone says, "I thought I was alone… but I'm not."

The Neda Centre does not chase numbers. It cultivates stories. Stories of courage reclaimed, of mothers breathing easier, of children growing up in homes where words like "HIV" are no longer whispered with fear, but spoken with understanding.

More than a facility, the Neda Centre is a declaration—that every human life matters, that education is a right, and that compassion can rewrite the story of even the deepest wounds.

When we meet pain with presence, when we replace judgment with justice, and when we choose to listen instead of look away—this is what emerges.

A place like Neda.

A place called healing.

Neda Centre near completion

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Chapter Twenty-One Chapter Twenty-One Youth Empowerment Through Entrepreneurship: The YES Programme

In a world that's constantly spinning, shifting, innovating—sometimes faster than your phone battery can keep up—there's one timeless truth that holds firm: young people aren't just the leaders of tomorrow. They are the *architects* of today. The dreamers, doers, code-crackers, climate warriors, garage inventors, and community builders.

That bold reality is exactly what inspired the creation of the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)—a vibrant, forward-thinking initiative designed to unlock the limitless potential of youth and hand them the keys to their own future. Through innovation. Through action. Through unapologetically big ideas.

YES is not your typical training program. It's not a dusty binder on a forgotten shelf. It's a full-blown *movement of mindset*—a launchpad for young changemakers to reimagine what's possible and then build it, pitch it, launch it, and scale it.

It takes the spark of an idea and turns it into a viable venture. It channels raw ambition into purposeful enterprise. It teaches that success isn't just about profit margins—but about impact, inclusion, and integrity. YES helps young people not just survive in today's rapidly evolving economy—but to thrive as innovators, collaborators, and purpose-driven leaders within it.

Building Skills, Confidence, and Community

From design thinking and digital marketing to sustainable business models, pitching skills, and leadership development, the YES curriculum is an all-you-can-learn buffet of future-ready skills. Each module is thoughtfully designed not just to fill heads, but to ignite hearts. Because true innovation doesn't come from memorizing theory—it comes from believing in your vision and being brave enough to chase it.

Participants receive both structured training and one-on-one mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs and industry leaders. And just in case you're wondering—no, there are no boring lectures or endless spreadsheets. Instead, there are challenge-based workshops, peer collaboration, story-sharing, and just the right amount of caffeine-fueled brainstorming.

Powered by Partnerships and Global Vision

This groundbreaking initiative wouldn't be possible without a unique blend of brilliant support:

- ABSA Bank of South Africa deserves a standing ovation for championing financial literacy, youth empowerment, and economic inclusion. Their commitment to laying strong financial foundations helped fuel YES from the very beginning.
- Deep gratitude also goes to the Vice Chancellor of the University of The Gambia, whose institutional leadership ensured the program's academic strength and regional reach. Because when higher education meets higher ambition—magic happens.
- And let's not forget David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. His generous support, thoughtful guidance, and global

advocacy helped shine an international spotlight on YES. (Let it be known: even world leaders can spot a game-changer when they see one. And they still know how to recognize raw, world-shaping potential when it walks in with a business plan and a bold idea.)

YES Means Access for All

At YES, we believe talent is universal—even if opportunity isn't. So we decided to change that.

That’s why the full curriculum is 100% free of charge and available in multiple languages—English, Persian, Amharic, and Swahili—to tear down barriers and open doors for young people from all walks of life. Because whether you're in Nairobi, Tehran, Addis Ababa, or a small town anywhere in between—everyone deserves the chance to build something meaningful.

We also believe that when women rise, entire societies rise. So YES is deeply committed to equity, inclusion, and ensuring that every participant, regardless of gender, background, or starting point, has a fair shot at success.

From Job Seekers to Job Creators

The impact of YES is not theoretical—it’s visible, measurable, and deeply personal. We’ve seen participants go from scribbling ideas in notebooks to pitching to investors. From being job seekers to becoming job creators. Every YES graduate is a ripple in a wave of change—uplifting families, strengthening communities, and building economies from the ground up.

But YES isn’t just about business. It’s about meaning. About purpose. It’s about the *why* behind the *what*. The human story behind every spreadsheet and pitch deck.

And above all, it’s about believing in young people—and giving them the tools, support, and space to prove the world just how powerful they really are.

The Future Doesn’t Wait—And Neither Should You

So, if you’re looking for proof that the next generation is ready, able, and already on the move—look no further than the YES program. These young entrepreneurs aren’t sitting back and waiting for change. They’re out there creating it. Scaling it. Sharing it.

They’re not asking permission.
They’re saying YES—loudly, proudly, and with purpose.

Rt Hon DAVID CAMERON MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dr Farzin Rahmani
Lyntonfields
Oxford Road
Woodstock
Oxon OX20 1QW

Thursday, 1st November 2012
Ref: DC/js/R

Dear Dr. Rahmani,

As you know from Julia in my office, I recently contacted Matthew Hancock MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Education, about your interesting proposal, the Junior Entrepreneurship Scheme.

I have now received a reply from the Minister, which I am enclosing for your interest and information. As you will read, the Minister is keen to introduce you to the relevant stakeholders in this field and asks you to contact Jane Stokes at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I would highly recommend taking him up on this offer.

Please do keep me in the loop with how this scheme progresses and do not hesitate to get back in touch if you think I can be of any further help.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me.

David Cameron

From the Member of Parliament for the Witney constituency in the district of West Oxfordshire, including Bampton, Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Witney and Woodstock.

Letter from the Rt. Hon. David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, regarding the Junior Entrepreneur Scheme

This letter highlights Prime Minister David Cameron’s support for the Junior Entrepreneur Scheme (JES)—a free educational training program that has been successfully implemented in various parts of the world. The scheme is designed to foster entrepreneurial thinking among young

students by encouraging creativity, innovation, and the development of business skills from an early age.

To date, it has been translated into four languages

 Learn more on the YES webpage

First group of students completing the Entrepreneurship Program over 10 years ago

The latest Yong Entrepreneur Scheme graduation in Uganda 2024

And latest report from Uganda , May 2025

YES UGANDA COHORT 3

BASIC INFORMATION.

GROUP NAME	VILLAGE	NO	GROUP MEMBERS	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	KIDS	BUSINESS IDEA	WHY YES
		1	Nakivumbi Yudaya	43	Single	2	Selling agricultural produce	Gain knowledge on bussiness growth
		2	Kiwanuka Ruth kato	61	Married	7	Rear chicken	To get knowledge and capital
		3	Tibaya Hajara	44	Single	6	Fresh foods and grocery selling	Get capital
		4	Akoth Roselyn	29	Single	3	Making liquid soap	Gain skills in running a business
		5	Tushabe Betty	43	Single	4	Baking	Get capital
		6	Nabukeera Shamim	34	Single	3	None	To learn and to get support
		7	Namwobya Brenda	27	Single	2	None	To get knowledge
		8	Mbeiza Maoureen	22	Single	0	None	To learn how to run a business
		9	Ingolet Kevin	35	Married	4	None	To get knowledge and be able to teach others
	Saka Busolo	10	Radika Ragu	24	Single		None	Learn how to run a business
		1	Opio Mary Claire	59	Married	5	Selling simsim	Get capital
		2	Namuzowola Justine	28	Married	3	Bakery	Do business with other women
		3	Namakoye Suzan Tenywa	40	Married	6	Tailoring	The program gives her hope
		4	Apollo Irene	50	Married	5	Selling cloths	Generate income
		5	Kabahweza Rose	54	Married	6	None	To understand how to run business and to get capital
		6	Nabirye Ruth	43	Married	5	Tailoring	Knowledge on how to run a busiiness and capital
	Mpumudde	7	Kakai Petwa	47	Married	4	Selling shoes	Knowledge on how to run a busiiness and capital
		1	Akoth Suzan	24	Married	1	None	Learn how to run a business
		2	Kisakye Christine	30	Married	3	None	Learn about running a business
		3	Zimba Harriet	30	Single	4	None	Gain business skills
		4	Namuwaya Harriet	27	Married	4	None	Knowledge on how to run a busiiness
		5	Kemugisha Zamu	24	Married	2	None	Acquire business skills
		6	Begumya Lydia	21	Married	1	None	Get working skills
		7	Mumbo Ayub	30	Married	3	None	Knowledge on how to run a business
	Kyamagwa	8	Enyongu Denis	38	Married	5	None	Gain knowledge and capital
		1	Muhindo Sherina	22	Married	3	Sell Mandazi (has a bussiness)	Get capital to add into her business
		2	Kituyi Lydia	39	Married	4	Grocery selling	Gain businesss knowledge and develop
		3	Nakubulwa Rashida	26	Married	3	Make and sell snacks (has a bussiness)	To get business ideas
		4	Nakintu Rebecca	48	Married	13	Selling onions and tomatoes (has a business)	Acquire knowledge
	Commercial	5	Nabirye Irene	39	Married	5	sell groceries	Acquire knowledge
	Cell 1	6	Among Farida	34	Married	3	Make briquets	Acquir knowledge
		1	Mutuwa Joan	19	Married	1	Briquets	Get capital
		2	Mutesi Scovia	28	Married	2	Briquets	Get capital
		3	Birungi Sarah	26	Married	1	Briquets	Knowledge on how to run a business
		4	Malore Zabia	48	Married	5	Grocery selling	Acquire business skills
	Commercial	5	Acham Mary	25	Married	1	Briquets (has business)	Learn how to account for a business
	Cell 2	6	Nanteza Jamawa	27	Married	3	Saloon	Get skills and get capital
		1	Babirye Christine	23	Single	0	None	Knowledge on how to run a business
		2	Adoch Vicky	24	Married	1	None	Get working skills
		3	Kafuka Robina	20	Married	2	None	Capital and working skills
		4	Kisige Fauza	18	Single	0	None	Gain business knowledge
		5	Nabirye Rebecca	18	Single	0	None	Gain business knowledge (has business)
	Kitovu	6	Namusubo Norah	21	Single	0	None	Gain experience and capital
		1	Pifuwa Scovia	27	Married	3	Saloon	Business knowledge
		2	Kauda Annet	34	Single	4	Tailoring	Get capital (has a business)
		3	Kiiza Robina	51	Married	9	Design Machine	Gain knowledge
		4	Mukisa Janet	28	Single	2	None	Learn how to run a business
		5	Nalongo Janet	30	Single	2	None	Get capital
		6	Lokube Agnes	31	Married	6	None	Get knowledge
		7	Nabirye Mariam	38	Single	1	None	Get knowledge
		8	Naigaga Elizabeth	64	Married	7	None	Get knowledge
		9	Babirye Afuwa	32	Single	4	None	Get knowledge
	Kamuli Road	10	Suubi Sylivia	34	Single	5	Selling groceries (has a business)	Get knowledge
		1	Kyokutema Zeulensi	60	Divorced	8	Selling Maize	Acquire knowledge of running a business (has a business)
		2	Tibiwa Efurance	42	Divorced	7	Chicken rearing	Get knowledge
		3	Mwesigwa Joel	31	Married	6	Piggery	Get knowledge
		4	Muyinda Edrine	23	Single	0	Farming	Get knowledge
		5	Kwagala Rebecca	30	Married	4	Selling groceries (has a business)	Get capital
		6	Aryema Ruth	38	Married	8	Selling Vegetable (has a business)	Get capital
	Masese	7	Uchamakeri	46	Married	9	Selling groceries (has a business)	Get capital

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Chapter Twenty-Two: Caring with Competence — Care Skill Training for a Changing World

As I look back on the many chapters that shaped my professional and personal journey, one stands out as a profound turning point: the creation and nurturing of the Care Skill Training Program. In a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape—and with a steadily growing elderly population—the need for compassionate, competent caregivers is no longer an aspiration. It is an imperative.

This program was not born from ambition alone, but from a deep recognition of human need. It was my privilege and honour to be involved from its inception. More than a technical course, it was a movement. A quiet yet determined call to elevate caregiving to its rightful place: not simply as a profession, but as a vocation grounded in empathy, dignity, and service.

Caregiving, I have come to understand, is not just about assisting with medication or managing daily routines. It is about truly seeing the person —recognizing their humanity, honouring their past, and being present for their current reality. It is about offering the kind of care we would want for our own loved ones, or for ourselves.

The Course: More Than Just Skills

From the outset, our training program was built on a philosophy of person-centred care. Participants were taught essential practices: personal hygiene, mobility assistance, nutrition and meal preparation, and emotional companionship. Yet beyond these tangible skills, they were guided to develop the softer, often more powerful abilities— compassionate listening, cultural sensitivity, and respectful communication.

Each individual in care is a universe unto themselves—a story still unfolding. We encouraged trainees to approach each person not as a "case" or a "client," but as someone rich with life experiences, longings, and silent strengths.

We also emphasized condition-specific training, ensuring caregivers understood the complexity of chronic and age-related conditions such as dementia, arthritis, stroke, and diabetes. This gave them not just technical competence, but emotional readiness. Illness and aging are often accompanied by feelings of fear, grief, and isolation. Our trainees were taught to respond not only with skill but with heart.

Structured for Impact, Shaped for Service

The program was thoughtfully structured into two major modules, each designed to build not just knowledge, but real-world readiness:

Module One focused on caregiving principles, effective communication, legal responsibilities, patient rights, and ethical boundaries. It laid the emotional and intellectual foundation for respectful, informed caregiving.
Module Two offered hands-on strategies for managing and adapting care for individuals living with chronic and degenerative conditions. From physical assistance to emotional resilience, students learned how to tailor their support with both sensitivity and confidence.
Together, these modules did more than prepare people for jobs—they prepared them for meaningful lives of service.

A Bridge to Purpose and Possibility

Seeing our graduates step into the world—equipped with knowledge, compassion, and confidence—has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. This training has offered so much more than career preparation. For many, it opened new pathways to self-worth, personal growth, and professional opportunity.

Our graduates found roles in:
Private home care
Residential and assisted living facilities
Community support and outreach programs
Personalized and in-home caregiving services

But beyond employment lies something even more profound: the chance to be part of someone’s story during their most vulnerable moments. The chance to help others age with grace, dignity, and the warmth of human kindness.

Accessible, Inclusive, and Internationally Recognized

Accessibility was a core value from the start. We ensured that language would never be a barrier by offering the full course in Farsi—empowering Persian-speaking communities to fully engage and benefit from the program.

Moreover, every graduate received a certificate from ABMA Education, a respected UK awarding body regulated by Ofqual. This not only affirmed their hard-earned skills but granted them professional recognition—unlocking new opportunities both locally and internationally.

This was never just about credentials. It was about building confidence, legitimacy, and a sense of belonging in a field where every act of kindness matters.
With My Deepest Gratitude

This program was a collaborative labor of love. It would not have been possible without the unwavering support, wisdom, and tireless commitment of extraordinary individuals who shared this vision with me.

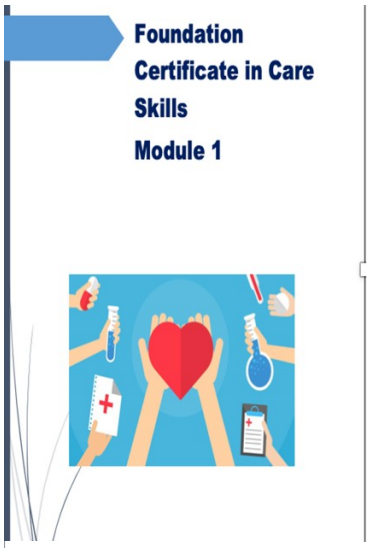
To Dr. Roya Shams, Mrs. Mehri Rohani Javaheri, Mrs. Shiva Shams, Mrs. Felour Behrouzi, and Mrs. Nooshin Hasheminejad—thank you. Your generosity of spirit, professional excellence, and dedication to training others have inspired and uplifted everyone involved.

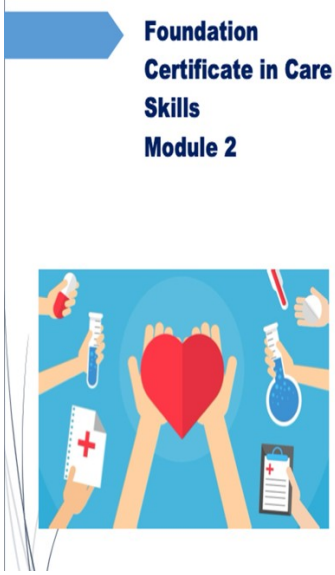
A heartfelt thank you as well to the incredible administrators of Home Care—Soroor, Parisa, and Nooshin. Your leadership, warmth, and belief in this mission have been nothing short of transformative. You brought not only structure but soul to this initiative.
This training program is not just a chapter in my life. It is a living, breathing testament to what is possible when care is guided by competence, and competence is elevated by love.
Let us continue to train not only with our minds but with our hearts—and to never forget that the act of caring is one of the highest forms of human connection.

https://www.globalpeaceandprosperityforum.com/service-projects-and-community-building/project-one-gjr6t

This is the second group of “Home Care” graduates in Johannesburg

South Africa.





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Chapter Twenty-Three: From Classroom to Cloud — The Story of Tarbiyat School & the Virtual Persian Academy

The story of Tarbiyat School in the UK is more than just the tale of a language program—it's a testament to identity, resilience, and the power of connection across borders.

Founded over 25 years ago, Tarbiyat School was born out of a desire to preserve and promote Farsi language, Persian culture, and Iranian heritage for families living far from home. In a world that moves quickly, where roots can easily be lost in the shuffle of immigration and assimilation, the school stood as a cultural anchor—especially for Iranian children growing up in the UK.

For many years, Tarbiyat operated as a physical school in London, offering classes in Farsi language and literature, as well as lessons in Persian history, art, and values. But it was never just about grammar or

vocabulary. It was about belonging. About giving children a space to understand where they come from—and parents a place to pass on what matters most.

Families didn’t just drop off students; they joined a community.

Then, about four years ago, Tarbiyat took a bold leap into the digital age.

Recognizing the growing demand for flexible, borderless education, the school transitioned into an online platform known as the Virtual Persian Academy. The move unlocked a whole new world of possibilities. Suddenly, students from Iran, the UK, the United States, Canada, and beyond were logging in—sharing lessons, stories, and identities across continents.

This transformation didn't just preserve the school’s mission—it amplified it.

With the support of Zambian Gems, the Virtual Persian Academy began to thrive. It developed its own line of custom Farsi textbooks, tailored to the modern student—clear, engaging, and deeply rooted in cultural relevance. These materials, combined with innovative teaching techniques and the flexibility of online learning, allowed students to learn at their own pace, from anywhere in the world.

Whether it's a young child in Birmingham learning their first Persian word, or a teenager in Toronto writing essays on Ferdowsi and Hafez, the Virtual Persian Academy continues to foster identity, pride, and unity among Persian-speaking communities across the globe.

In a world where so much can be lost in translation, Tarbiyat School and its virtual evolution remind us that language is more than communication—it’s connection, memory, and future all at once.

Chapter Twenty-Four: Courage in the Classroom — Cluster Education in Afghanistan

In August 2021, as the world watched Afghanistan fall back into the hands of the Taliban, what followed was not only a political upheaval, but a deep human crisis. The most jarring of its consequences has been the systematic exclusion of girls from formal education—a policy that doesn't just deny human rights but actively erases the promise of a nation’s future.

In the face of this darkness, Cluster Education was born.

More than a schooling program, it became a resilient, grassroots movement—an act of defiance and hope built from the ground up, brick by brick, classroom by classroom.

Recognizing that education is both a basic right and a tool of liberation, Cluster Education was developed to deliver accessible, community-based learning opportunities for Afghan girls who had been shut out of formal systems. Its goal was simple but urgent: to ensure that girls could continue to read, write, think, and dream—even when the world told them not to.

What Makes It Work

Cluster Education is built on a model of local empowerment and cultural sensitivity. By working hand-in-hand with trusted community leaders and educators, it remains responsive to the social realities and regional nuances of each area. This localization fosters trust, acceptance, and long-term sustainability—making it far more resilient than any externally imposed initiative could ever be.

And its scope goes well beyond literacy. Cluster Education includes:

- Performance tracking and evaluation
- Scholarship and mentorship opportunities
- Job-oriented skills training
- Encouragement for higher education—both within Afghanistan and internationally

Each student is seen not just as a learner but as a future leader, capable of uplifting not only herself but her community.

To ensure the program remains accountable and adaptive, a robust system of monitoring and evaluation has been put in place—tracking performance, spending, and outcomes while also adjusting quickly to risks and challenges in a volatile environment.

A Movement, Not Just a Mission

Cluster Education is not merely about schoolbooks or classrooms. It is a movement of resilience. A declaration that every girl matters, that knowledge can’t be silenced, and that even in the darkest times, there is light.

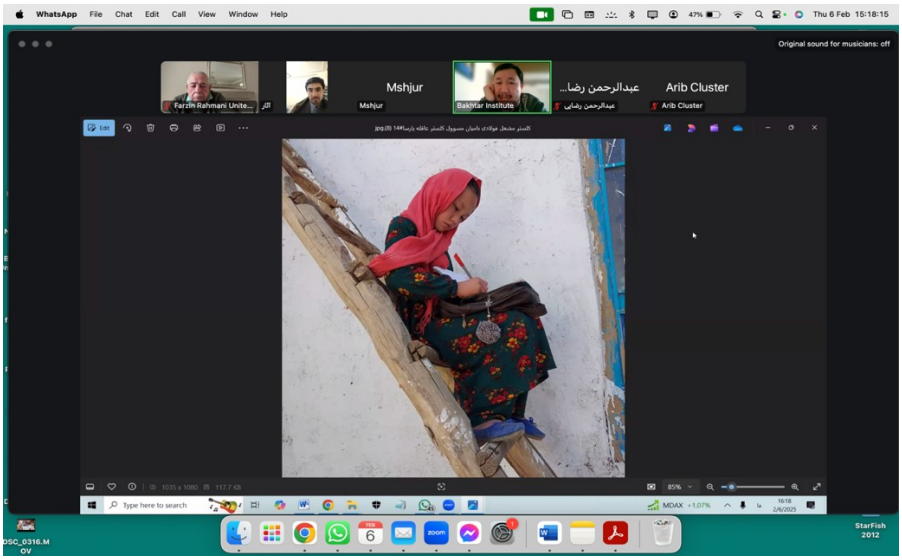
The early 2024 impact report reflects this bold vision in action:

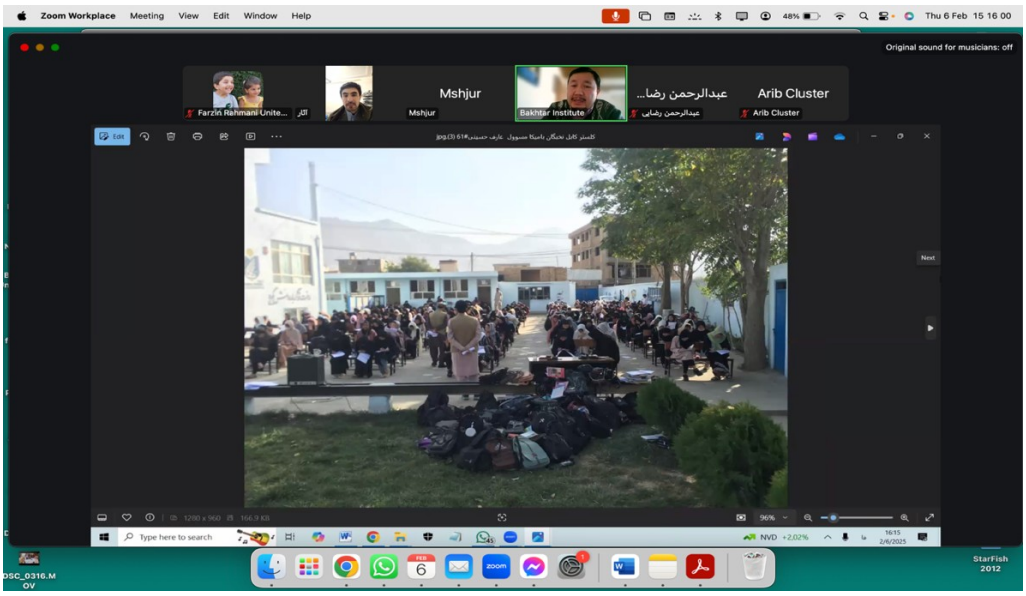
- Cluster sites: 17 regions
- Total students: 4,278
- Staff employed: 155
- Monthly operating cost: $13,096
- Cost per student: Just $3.06/month

These numbers, though modest by global standards, reflect something immense: the possibility of impact at scale, even under extreme adversity.

Every pencil held by a student, every word read aloud, is an act of quiet rebellion and boundless possibility.

Cluster Education proves that when you combine courage with community, even the most entrenched obstacles can be dismantled—one educated girl at a time.





For further information or making a donation,

please contact:

1) Azizullah Royesh, program director, at marefat12@gmail.com

2) Justine Hefter, CEO 30Birds Foundation, at Justin.Hefter@gmail.com

3) Amy Madsen, Program Officer, 30Birds Foundation, at amycmadsen@gmail.com

4) David Gershon, CEO Empowerment Institute, at dgershon@empowermentinstitute.net

5) Dr. Farzin Rohmani, Board Member Zambian Gems Foundation, at frahmani9@gmail.com

Monthly Reports

Cluster Education

December 2023

Report Collector: Ali Omid
Prepared by: Cluster Education Team

No	Cluster		Coordinator	Start Date	December			Total in USD
	Name	Location			Stdnt	Staff	Wage	
1	Modabber	Ghazni	Baqir Modabber	01/05/2023	475	16	96,000	1371.43
2	Andarab	Baghlan	Engineer Bahman	01/05/2023	210	8	0	0.00
3	Bamika	Kabul	Arif Hussaini	04/05/2023	395	13	78,000	1114.29
4	Arghosha	Bamyan	Salman Ali Danishyar	04/10/2023	530	18	108,000	1542.86
5	Setargan	Bamyan	Abdul Rahman Rezayi	04/10/2023	310	11	66,000	942.86
6	Sangchasban	Bamyan	Hamida Mohsini	04/10/2023	250	9	54,000	771.43
7	Foladi	Bamyan	Aqila Parsa	04/10/2023	380	15	90,000	1285.71
8	Naji	Mazar	Aziz Nori	05/05/2023	160	11	66,000	942.86
9	Isteqlal	Quetta	Nasir Bakhshi	06/05/2023	230	8	48,000	685.71
10	Mobin	Ghazni	Ali Shah Saqib	04/06/2023	224	6	36,000	514.29
11	Yakawlang	Yakawlang - Bamyan	Musa Ibrahimi	04/06/2023	129	4	24,000	342.86
12	Zarsang	Panjaw - Bamyan	Chaman Ali Mahdawi	04/06/2023	405	13	78,000	1114.29
13	Lal	Lal - Ghor	Amohammd Ali Frogh	04/06/2023	300	9	54,000	771.43
14	Gardiz	Gardiz - Paktia	Aimal Paktin	04/23/2023	120	7	0	0.00
15	Khost	Khost - Paktia		04/23/2023	160	5	0	0.00
16	Payami Andisha	Bamyan		04/23/2023			0	0.00
17	Evaluation Team	Kabul	Mahjor/Eng Zia			2	12,000	171.43
18	Miscellaneous expenses (Allowance, Stationery, Prize, trip expenses,...)						26,250	375.00
			Total in Afghani		4278	155	836250	11946.43
			Total in USD				11946	
19	Program Director	USA	Azizullah Royesh				0	
20	Report Collector	Germany	Ali Omid				200	
21	ECF Fees	USA	ECF				950	
			Gross Total in USD				13096	
Monthly Cost Per Student							3.06	

د افغانستان اسلامی امارت
د پوهنې وزارت
Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan
Ministry of Education
ریاست معارف بامیان
لیسه زردسنگ

Appreciation letter

Date: 14.04.2024
No: 09

Dear Mr. Farzin Rahmani, Associates of the Cluster Education!

The administrative board of Zardsang High School and the residents of Markia Ulia villages, Punjab district, Bamyan province, sincerely appreciate your tiredless efforts, non-stop efforts and constructive struggles in supporting the education of women and girls, at this critical juncture and in the age of hardship and homelessness of this civilizing section of the society. And thank you, you have happiness, he prays for more prosperity and more success.

With respect

Letter of Commendation

Thanks be to God that the realm of education is blessed with educated teachers who use every precious moment of their lives with a unique commitment in the direction of cultivating the thoughts and faith of the future builders of the country.

Mr. farzin Rahmani

one of supporters of the Educational Program

Your years of honest service in the field of education, God's satisfaction is the most worthy reward, and what reward is more worthy and beautiful than this.
While wishing you health and well-being, we thank you for your years of effort and compassionate cooperation.
I hope that the Golestan of your life will always be fresh and fragrant from the grace of truth.

ON June 2 / 2024

Principal of Payam Andisha Private High School

Move to archive
Ministry of Education
Ghazni Educational Adminstration
Modabber Private High School
Cluster Education Program
Certificate of Appreciation
Mr. Farzin Rahmani for your invaluable efforts in education programs, especially girls' education. Your extraordinary support has led to significant changes in our community. Undoubtedly, the value you have added is demonstrated in the mindset established among the learners and educators in our organization. I hope you keep up your great work. Thus we wish you the best of luck.
Moh. Baqer Modabber
Establisher and Principal of Modabber Private High School

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Chapter Twenty-Five: Coming Full Circle — A Dream for Malawi

In mid-2024, a story of transformation came full circle.

Corretious Chisie, one of the bright and determined young women raised at St. Cecilia Orphanage, reached a major milestone—completing both her secondary and tertiary education in Zambia, and qualifying as a professional educator.

But her greatest act of service was yet to come.

Rooted in love for her homeland, Malawi, Corretious made the deeply personal decision to return and give back. She carried with her not just credentials, but a dream: to open a school. A place where children like her—once vulnerable, full of potential, and searching for opportunity—could find the tools to rise.

At Zambian Gems, we saw in Corretious not just a graduate, but a leader. A seed we had once helped plant was now ready to sow new seeds of her own. We proudly and wholeheartedly committed to supporting her dream.

What followed was a moment of profound generosity.

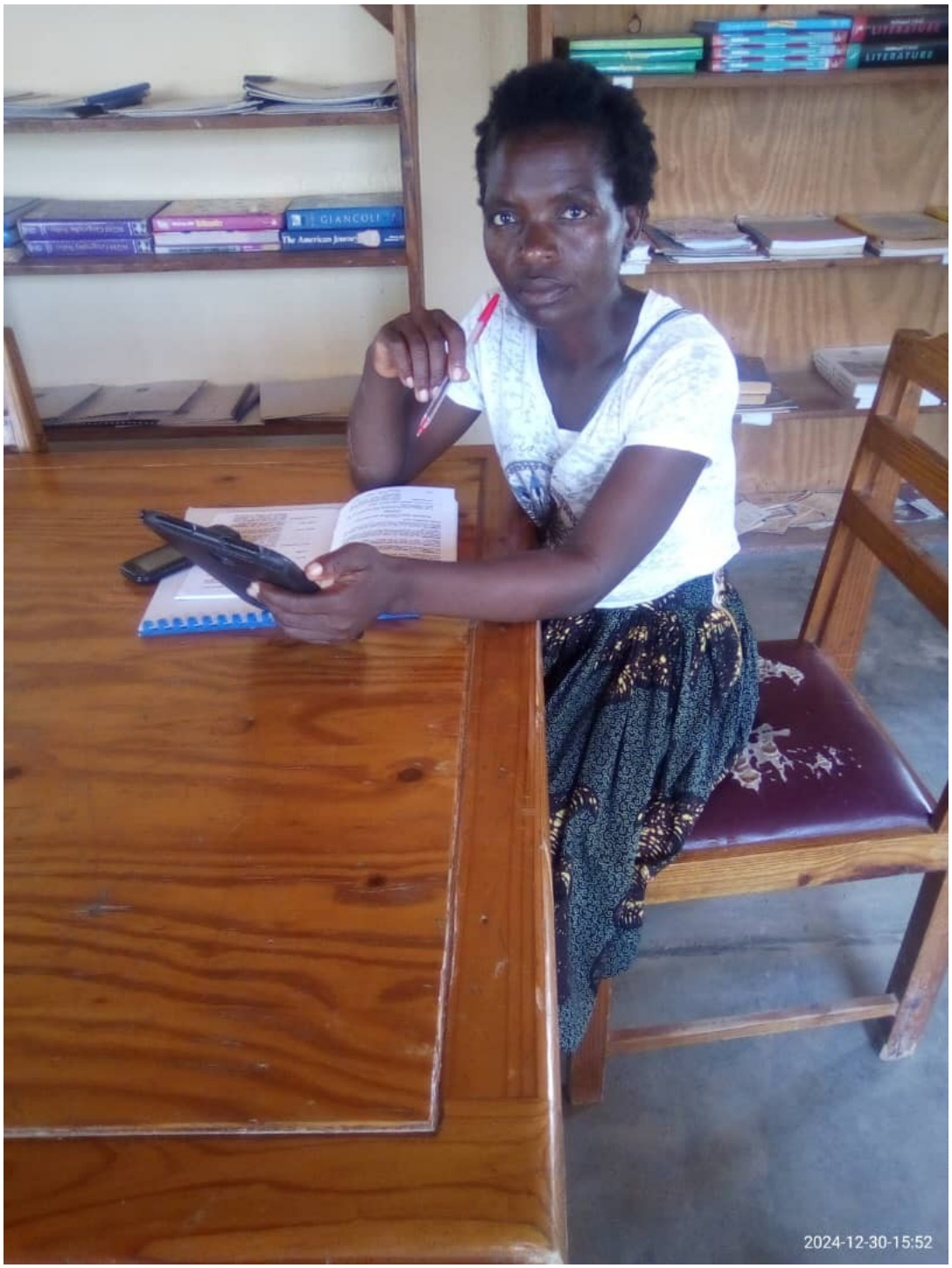
Long-time supporters of Zambian Gems, Mr. Khodadad and Mrs. Tahereh Jamaspian, offered to fund the new educational institute in Mzimba, Malawi. It was a gesture grounded in love, hope, and an unwavering belief in the power of education to change lives.

And so, the school was named in honour of Mrs. Tahereh Jamaspian—a woman whose warmth and compassion left a lasting imprint on every life she touched.

Though Tahereh sadly passed away during the school’s construction, she knew it was being built in her name. She knew that her legacy—her spirit of service and her boundless generosity—would live on in every student who walks through those doors.

The Tahereh Jamaspian Institute will not only educate; it will inspire. It will be a place of belonging, opportunity, and vision for children in one of Malawi's most underserved regions. And it will serve as a living tribute to one remarkable woman, and one extraordinary young educator who dared to return and build.

This story—like so many in our journey—is proof that education does not end at graduation. It begins anew every time it is passed forward.



Corretious Chisie founder and director of Tahereh Jamaspian , Mzimba Malawi

Students started schooling even before school was officially open

Chapter Twenty-Six: A Circle That Never Breaks — Partnership with Full Circle Learning

As I look back on this winding, wondrous path, it would be impossible—not to mention unfair—to leave out one of the most cherished partnerships in my life: the enduring and deeply meaningful collaboration with the Full Circle Learning Foundation, based in the USA.

And at the heart of that foundation is none other than its visionary founder and my beloved sister, Dr. Teresa Langness.

For the past 15 years, Zambian Gems and Full Circle Learning have joined hands in shared missions of education, service, and empowerment—reaching hearts across continents, and kindling lights in places that too often sit in shadow. Together, we've nurtured students, uplifted teachers, and united communities through values-based learning programs that do far more than just educate—they transform.

What makes Full Circle Learning so exceptional is its unique model: a holistic integration of academics, life skills, local service, and global wisdom exchange. It doesn't simply prepare students for exams. It prepares them for life with meaning.

Children learn through themes anchored in empathy, justice, and global responsibility—exploring real-world issues like poverty, climate resilience, peacebuilding, food security, elder care, and more. But they do so with hearts open, inspired to solve problems not just with logic, but with love.

The core philosophy—what they call the "habits of heart"—has inspired classrooms from Zambia to The Gambia, from the US to Ethiopia, from Malawi to Iran. Each project is a thread in a larger tapestry of hope, weaving together people from every background in pursuit of something sacred: a better, kinder, more unified world.

To witness the reach of Full Circle Learning is to witness a quiet revolution. In each of the countries where it plants seeds, something miraculous grows—not just smarter students, but more compassionate citizens.

This partnership has been one of the deepest joys of my life. Teresa's integrity, clarity of purpose, and boundless energy have been both mirror and beacon. In every challenge and every triumph, our collaboration has reminded me that true service is never a solo act—it's a circle. And it never breaks.

As our shared work continues to expand across borders and generations, I hold one enduring belief: when learning is full of purpose, when education serves the soul as well as the mind, we don't just raise scholars—we raise human beings capable of healing the world.

And that, more than any title or project, is the legacy that matters most.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: From Friendship to Opportunity — A Journey Across Borders to Botswana

In the ongoing journey of Zambian Gems, there are milestones that shimmer with global reach, and others that shine more subtly—quiet moments of deep human connection that, over time, reveal their transformative power.

This is one such story.

It begins more than two decades ago in Zambia, with a dear friend and a shared devotion to service. Mrs. Mehri Rohani—a talented nurse, a mentor, and a radiant soul—has been a close companion on this journey for over 20 years. After a respected career in Canada, Mehri moved to Zambia with her family, where they co-founded the now-celebrated Banani School. As its longtime director, Mehri became a guiding light to students and families alike—fusing education with warmth, discipline with kindness.

After retiring from school leadership, Mehri hoped to return to her original calling: nursing.

Around that same time, Zambian Gems launched its online Home Care training program, and Mehri enthusiastically joined the tutor team—bringing her expertise and compassion to students from across South Africa, Canada, and beyond. Her mentorship extended even further when she began teaching sessions in collaboration with BIHE (the Bahá’í

Institute for Higher Education), where she quickly became a beloved presence among young learners.

Then, in early 2024, life delivered an unexpected turn. Mehri lost her vision entirely. She could no longer teach—but what followed was something no one could have predicted.

An Unexpected Detour

Not long after, a close friend in Botswana—Zambia's southern neighbour—made a dramatic decision. Owning a university campus in Gaborone, the capital, he chose to gift it to the community, entrusting others to imagine its next chapter. I was invited to Botswana for consultations about this opportunity. The discussions were promising, but no clear path had yet formed.

On my way back, I made a short visit to Zambia to see Mehri. It was just a day and a half, and within that, I had two free hours. During that brief window, I accepted an invitation to Eden University, a prominent institution in Lusaka.

What began as a casual visit turned quickly into a profound conversation with Eden's CEO and Vice Chancellor. As we spoke, I shared details of the available campus in Botswana. Their eyes lit up. What followed was a flurry of questions, interest, and possibilities—especially around expanding Eden's medical and nursing programs into Botswana.

Had I not gone to see Mehri—had I not paused my journey for that one heartfelt visit—I may never have crossed paths with Eden's leadership. And the dream of bringing higher education opportunities to Botswana may have remained just that: a dream.

Today, consultations are underway, and the vision of Eden University establishing a cross-border academic presence is nearing fruition.

And at the heart of this story? A friend. A nurse. A teacher. A woman whose kindness moved me to travel—and whose spirit quietly, unknowingly, opened a new doorway for impact.

It's a reminder that in the intricate fabric of life, the threads of friendship, timing, and intention often weave the most unexpected and beautiful patterns.

Sometimes, the most lasting change doesn't come from strategy—but from showing up, from caring deeply, and from following the gentle nudge to honour a bond.

A Vision of Oneness
Home to educational institutions that foster oneness consciousness
Global Collaboration
We invite global universities and educational institutions to collaborate with us in pursuit of a shared goal: creating an extraordinary environment that nurtures skill development, ethical growth, and the social advancement of Botswana's youth.
Oneness Consciousness
We are dedicated to promoting unity, shared understanding, and a collective sense of purpose in all our endeavors. This shared vision guides our academic programs and student experiences.

Final Chapter: One Wild, Beautiful Ride

Finally, I just want to say—thank you.

Life’s been a wild ride. Kind of like coordinating a group project across time zones, cultures, and Wi-Fi strengths. It’s been messy, unpredictable, occasionally absurd, and often overwhelming—but it’s also been filled with grace, growth, and a lot of snack breaks.

Along the way, I’ve had the privilege of working with remarkable souls—friends, collaborators, colleagues, and complete strangers who became family. Together, we navigated surgical theatres and schoolyards,

refugee camps and classrooms, board meetings and border crossings. And somewhere in between, we found meaning. We built something.

To my family: thank you for being the calm in the storm and occasionally the storm itself. Thank you for your patience with my chaos, for your brutal honesty, and for showing up—even when you probably had better things to do. Love isn't always tidy, but it's the thread that holds everything together. And yours has held me more than you know.

To my friends: you've added the music, the mischief, and the memes. You've filled my life with laughter, strange advice, philosophical rants, and more group chats than any one mortal should endure. You've taught me resilience, caffeine tolerance, and the subtle art of finding hope in a WhatsApp message at 2 a.m.

To the students, colleagues, patients, activists, and dreamers I've had the joy of walking beside: thank you for trusting me, challenging me, forgiving my mistakes, and sharing your stories. Every moment mattered.

I've done what I could. There's always more to do—but I'm proud of the journey. Of the joy, the chaos, the quiet impact, and the people who carried me when I couldn't carry myself.

So here's to the people, the purpose, and the imperfections. Here's to the detours that led to better destinations. Here's to you.

Thanks for being part of it. I love you all.

Farzin

Title: From Anesthesia to Awakening: A Life in Service

By: Farzin